

AN ALL-NEW, BONE-CHILLING NOVEL BASED ON THE TERRIFYING FILMS!

# HALLOWEEN

THE OLD MYERS  
PLACE

Home is  
where the  
heart is...  
ripped out!



KELLY O'ROURKE

## *Oh God! I've got to get out of here!*

A dark figure emerged from the woods and darted across the street toward the house.

His hot breath hung in the freezing night air as he squatted down, his face hidden in the shadows of the toolshed. His hateful eyes greedily watched the sexy redheaded girl through her bedroom window, lazing about on her bed as if she didn't have a care in the world. A vicious growl escaped from his lips.

A rush of adrenaline pumped through his body as his feet led him around the back of her house. He violently slashed away a thick mass of ivy that clung against the metal power box. With a crude, rusted ax in his filthy hand, he hacked ribbons of wire loose from their deeply rooted nesting inside the box.

The power groaned off and the house went dark.

The figure silently moved up the steps of the back porch and began tugging on the flimsy screen door.

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Mary sat up on her bed and shrieked when the electricity suddenly snapped off.

She forced herself to stay calm as she groped around for one of her aromatherapy candles. She squinted in the dark ness and found a book of matches in her bedside dresser. The tiny orange flame let off a puff of sulfur as she touched it to the wick of an evergreen-scented candle.

Mary cupped the candle in her hands. The flickering light shone eerily around the room. Suddenly, her heart thudded heavily as she heard a rattling at the back door.

"Oh God no," she whispered.

Her voice quivered. "Mom? Dad? Is that you?"

Mary panicked. *Of course it's not my parents! They would have used the front door!*

She silently moved across her room and picked up the phone receiver.

A pang of terror shot through her brain as she discovered that the line was dead.

*Oh God! I've got to get out of here!*

The light rattling against the back door swiftly turned into desperate, maniacal pounding. But the loud, forceful thuds were drowned out by the dreadful sound of her furiously pumping heart.

*Is the dead bolt locked? I can't remember....*

Suddenly, the door downstairs crashed open with jarring force. Mary jumped backward and sucked in her breath.

*Help me! Somebody help me!*

Heavy footsteps clunked across the hardwood floor and moved swiftly up the stairs.

Before Mary could blow out the candle and hide she heard her bedroom doorknob rattling.

*"No! Noooooo!"* she screamed.

She hurled her body against the door and racked her brain for some way to escape the nightmarish situation. Her eyes darted around in the pitch-black darkness, searching for something, anything, to use as a weapon.

Mary shrieked and watched in horrified fascination as the weight on the other side of the door buckled the wood inward. With a splitting noise, the lock popped and the door crashed wide open.

# CHAPTER

## 1

Mary White sat on the porch swing, trying to enjoy the October sunset. Steam billowed up from her mug of herbal tea as she put it to her lips. The hot, sweet liquid took the edge off the chilly wind that tousled through her long auburn hair. Mary snuggled into her aquamarine sweat suit. She glanced away from the opal-colored sky and looked over her shoulder at the house.

Funny, it still didn't feel like *home*.

Even though the moving cartons had been unpacked months ago and she'd set up her room just like it had been back in Los Angeles, it just wasn't right.

She sighed and took another sip of tea. Maybe it was just the stress of moving to a small town and having to leave her friends behind just before her senior year.

Most of the kids at her new high school were pretty cool, though. They hadn't been as backward as she'd expected. Her old friends in Los Angeles had warned her that the kids in Illinois would be three years behind in fashion and music. But everyone seemed to be pretty hip out here.

Mary had instantly been picked up by the popular clique when school started. She was pretty and self-confident, not to mention interesting, which scored her more than enough points with the local socialites.

Mary felt mysterious, and kind of liked being the new girl with no past. No one here would ever know what she looked like with silver braces across her teeth or how she fainted and fell off the risers during a chorus performance in seventh grade. They'd never know that just last year she was one of the wildest girls in Los Angeles, that she wore black leather and dyed her hair jet black. Here, she could be whatever she chose to be. Here, she had a totally clean slate. Her old wardrobe and crazy life were two thousand miles behind her.

It was her new house that was the problem.

Her house had a past, just like she did.

Some of the kids had just about died when she'd told them where she lived. Instantly, they'd filled her in on the house's bloodcurdling history.

Mary was horrified to find out that her house had been the home of a serial killer named Michael Myers. They said that he'd murdered his own sister with a butcher knife on Halloween night twenty-five years ago, in what was now Mary's room! They told her grisly tales of how he escaped from a mental hospital fifteen years later and came back to Haddonfield, where he murdered twelve teenagers on Halloween. They said that he returned to Haddonfield again last Halloween. Officials had blamed him for the murders of six more people just last year, but they never captured him or had any hard evidence that it was Michael Myers.

So, they still called her house the Old Myers Place.

They said the police never found his body.

They said he was still alive.

They said he was still out there, and thirsty for blood.

Mary shrugged most of it off as urban folklore and everyone soon stopped teasing her. Besides, there really wasn't much left of the original house after her parents had remodeled it in hospital-sterile white paint and stucco.

But sometimes, at night, Mary would be unable to sleep. She would toss and turn, wondering just how much of it was true.

Mary's new friends seemed to accept her even though she lived in the Old Myers Place and saw her as just a cool new girl from the West Coast. They sometimes teased her with the nickname "Valley Girl" because of her California accent.

"What are you, like, talking about?" she'd playfully respond, which always got a laugh.

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The pink sunset cast a beautiful glow against the clean white paint on Mary's house. It reminded her of the first time she'd ever seen Jeff Wayland.

She remembered how he'd terrified her.

It was just after they'd moved into the house in August. Her parents were on a total remodeling kick and the old Victorian house was in complete shambles. Mary couldn't understand why they'd bought this old house instead of a new one, since they'd practically gutted it only to rebuild the entire thing. But her parents had insisted that the house was a classic, and they'd paid nearly nothing for it.

Mary had just woken up on that warm Saturday morning and had heard a strange scratching noise at her window. Figuring it was just a bird, she'd stepped out of bed wearing only a T-shirt and a pair of flowered bikini briefs. She'd screamed when she saw the handsome face of a teenage boy peering through her second-story window. He'd stared at her for a moment before he disappeared.

Her mother had rushed into her room. "What's the matter, Mary? Are you hurt?"

Mary had grabbed her scarlet silk robe from the headboard of the bed and thrown it around her shoulders. "Somebody was watching me! Someone was looking in my window!" she'd cried.

Mary's mom had peeked out the window and laughed. Her hair was the same reddish shade as Mary's, but it was cut short. "It's just the carpenter's son, honey. We hired them to do the final touches on the house. I reminded you yesterday that he would be painting the shutters this morning. But you never listen, do you?" she said. "Jeff is a very nice young man, just about your age. I asked him if he'd show you around Haddonfield this afternoon. I hope you don't mind. I thought you'd like to meet some kids your age besides your cousin Julifer before you start school next month."

"Mom!" Mary had gasped. "You set me up on a date with a guy who's seen me in my underwear! This is so totally humiliating!"

Mary had gingerly stepped over to the window and seen a handsome young man in faded jeans climbing down a ladder. His dark blond hair sparkling in the morning sun light, he'd looked up at the window and quickly turned away when he saw Mary standing there. His cheeks had been red with embarrassment. He was really cute, too, which had made Mary feel even more like a total idiot.

Mrs. White had scurried out the room and called, "Well, if you would have put up those drapes last week, like I told you to..."

Mary had flopped onto her bed and buried her head in her hands, feeling hopelessly frustrated. She knew her mom had just been trying to help out, but she preferred to make her own dates, thank-you-very-much.

"What a great start," she'd thought sarcastically. "But at least maybe now I won't have to hang out with my creepy cousin Julifer when school starts."

Mary's cousin Julifer was only going to be a sophomore next year and the two girls did not get along. Julifer was completely into the alternative music scene and wore black clothing and painted her face with ridiculous black and white makeup all the time. The music she listened to wasn't so bad, but her Gothic, creepy attire was just a little too drastic for the small town of Haddonfield. Mary had decided to change her wild looks and try to start over as a new person when they'd moved here. Her wild, club-going days in L.A. were over, and she didn't want the kids at school to think she was anything like her stupid cousin.

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As the last blinding ray of orange sunlight disappeared over the hills, Mary set her empty teacup next to the jack-o'-lantern by the porch front door. It was almost Halloween now, and things had sure changed since that day she'd met Jeff.

"Jeff," she sighed. "What a jerk."

Mary heard the phone ringing in the house. She grabbed her cup and rushed inside to answer before the machine picked up.

She huffed, "Hello?" and sat down on the white leather sofa. She stretched the phone cord from the pine end table. "We've got to get a cordless," she mumbled.

"Hey, Shannon," she said into the receiver. "What's the latest dirt?"

Mary closed her eyes and pictured her new friend. Shannon Geary was extremely tall and wore her dark hair in a stylish, sleek bob with the sides clipped back in little barrettes. She looked a little like Winona Ryder and was one of the wealthiest and most popular girls

at Haddonfield High. But she was a major gossip, Mary had quickly learned. You had to be careful what you said around Shannon—unless, of course, you *wanted* the whole school to know.

Mary's cheeks blushed and a smile spread across her face as she listened to her friend. "You're kidding!" she cried. "*The* Josh Pinder is going to ask me out?"

Mary kicked off her designer aerobics shoes and buried her toes in the white shag carpeting.

Josh Pinder was only the coolest, greatest-looking guy in town. She'd had a major crush on the Brad Pitt look-alike since school started. So did every other girl in town.

Mary held the phone by her shoulder. "This is too cool! Thanks for the 411, Shannon. I'll see you tomorrow."

Mary hung up and smiled to herself. She turned on the TV and surfed the channels all the way to MTV.

"Josh Pinder!" she squealed in between music videos. She wondered when and where he was going to do the asking. Josh hung out with the same crowd as Mary, but he was always flirting with all the girls and could never seem to hang exclusively with one member of the female species for longer than a week.

Mary toyed with the idea of turning him down to avoid becoming another one of his heartbroken victims.

"Nah," she said. It would be too much fun to try and be the one to finally tame the tiger. He'd been flirting with her lately, but then he flirted with everybody.

Every girl in school drooled over him.

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Since her parents wouldn't be home until later, Mary turned up the volume of the TV, then flipped on the track lights in the living room and went upstairs to pick out an awesome outfit for tomorrow.

Her parents had been working late a lot these days. They were architects and had been hired to design Haddonfield's mega-shopping mall, which had been the main reason for the move across the country. Her parents had been recommended for the job by



Mary's uncle Bob, who lived in Haddonfield and was on the city planning committee. The mall was scheduled to open by Thanksgiving weekend, which meant that she'd be seeing little to none of the folks for the next month.

Mary had understood that this job was a big break for them. To make up for the damage of uprooting her from Los Angeles, they'd bought her a new red convertible. In return, Mary had promised to clean up her act and stay out of trouble.

"Life is good!" she exclaimed as she danced in front of her dressing mirror. Things really were going pretty well. Mary realized that for the first time in her life, she and her parents were considered rich, whereas in Los Angeles they had been just another middle-class family.

Mary stepped inside her walk-in closet and thumbed through her new wardrobe. Even the clothes were cheaper out here, which allowed her threads budget to stretch beyond her wildest dreams. She pulled a pair of black designer jeans and a white cashmere sweater from the hangers and tore off the price tags. She shimmied herself into the skintight denim and twirled around to catch a rear view. She smiled, satisfied that her choice would do nothing but encourage Josh to ask her out.

"Now for the do," she said, sighing. She disapprovingly lifted up a long lock of her baby-fine hair. "Definitely a day to crimp."

Mary went back into her closet and began searching for the box with her crimping iron in it. She pushed aside her winter coat and sweaters to shed a little light on the boxes lined against the closet wall. She hadn't put kinks in her hair for nearly a year, ever since the fad had fizzled out back home. But here, all the girls were doing it. She laughed, remembering how her friends in L.A. had told her about the small-town fashion time warp. "So, they're only *one* year behind. Oh, well. When in Rome, do as the Romans do," she said with a chuckle.

Mary saw the box she was looking for in the far corner on the floor. She reached behind a larger box, stretching as far as she could.

"Shoot!" she exclaimed.

Mary's gold tennis bracelet fell from her wrist to the floor with a light jingling sound. She pushed aside the large cardboard box, which was filled with her old shoes. She knew she would be in big trouble if she lost that bracelet. It had been a special gift from her parents on her last birthday and she *never* took it off. Not even in the shower.

The bracelet dangled by its shiny clasp between the floorboards.

Carefully, she pinched the clasp in her fingers. She breathed a sigh of relief as she gently tugged at the chain to free it. But before she could wiggle it loose, the bracelet slipped from her fingers and disappeared into the black space between the boards.

"No!" she cried. "Oh no!"

Mary knelt down on her knees, desperately trying to catch a glimpse of the gold bracelet. She had to find it! She pushed her long hair from her face and leaned toward the floor, peering through the crack between the floorboards. She saw nothing but what seemed to be endless blackness.

Mary wondered what was down there.

She hadn't seen an empty space in floor plans for the remodeling.

Mary didn't like the idea of going down there. Not at all.

The horrible history of the house flashed through her mind.

But she *had* to find it.

Mary tugged gently at one of the soft old boards, lifting it up a little. She reached inside and waved her hand around, feeling nothing but cold, damp air.

A loud sound from under the house startled Mary. She jerked her arm from the boards and jumped to her feet, her heart pounding heavily in her chest.

*What was down there!*

Mary stepped backward out of the closet, her eyes glued to the floor.

Suddenly, she heard footsteps downstairs. They were moving closer. They were coming up the stairs!

Fear welled up in her stomach. A small, swallowing sound came from her throat. Her heart thudded in her ears, drowning out all other noises.

She opened her mouth to scream as the doorknob turned.

Mrs. White popped her head through the doorway. "Hi, Mary! We brought home Chinese takeout." She stared at her daughter for a moment, wondering why she looked so startled. "Honey? Are you okay?" she asked.

Mary let out a little laugh, relieved that it was just her parents. "I'm fine, Mom. I just... never mind," she said.

Mrs. White smiled. "Okay. We'll see you downstairs."

# CHAPTER

## 2

### *Haddonfield High*

Mary stuffed a stack of books into her locker and removed her pink nylon lunch bag. She peeked inside. Gross. It was a tuna sandwich and chips again. She imagined Josh Pinder asking her out and then changing his mind after she'd just about killed him with her fish breath. Mary glanced down the corridor, which was bustling with students. She hadn't seen Josh anywhere today.

Mary saw Kimmy Harrison waving at her cheerfully. Kimmy's long blond hair bounced as she bounded down the hall. She wore a black and white pin-striped coat over black stretch pants with a pair of hot-pink loafers. Kimmy wasn't particularly pretty, but she was cute. She had the bubbliest personality Mary had ever seen.

"Hey, Valley Girl!" Kimmy chirped. "Did Josh ask you out yet?"

Mary's cheeks flushed. "No. As a matter of fact, I haven't even seen him today." Mary was a little annoyed and wondered how many people Shannon had shared this information with. "This is so embarrassing! Does the whole school keep up with Josh's love life or what?"

"Yep. Pretty much." Kimmy smiled. "Small town. Remember?"

"Yeah." Mary sighed. "I don't know if I'll ever get used to it. I mean, where I come from, people actually have lives! You know?"

Kimmy put her arm around Mary as they walked toward the cafeteria. "Don't get so stressed, Mary. It'll give you wrinkles."

Mary relaxed a little. "Do I look okay? I mean, do you think he'll back out or anything?"

Kimmy smiled. "You look hot, girl friend. I love the outfit! Size four?"

Mary snorted. "As if! But thanks for the compliment."

Kimmy pulled her jacket down over her hips. She was a little too heavy for her small frame, but she hid it well. "Of course he's not going to back out, Mary. Don't worry."

At the cafeteria, Mary and Kimmy strode over to their usual table by the window. Shannon was already there, dressed in a stylish black turtleneck sweater. Shannon's sterling-silver heart charm dangled from her neck as she leaned over to whisper something in Tanya Taylor's ear. Tanya flipped back her curly blond hair, which was cascading down the front of her pale blue ski sweater. Her jaw dropped as she listened. Shannon quickly sat down when she saw Mary and Kimmy walking over.

Tanya gave Mary the once-over with her blue eyes before she flashed an insincere smile.

Shannon squeezed a packet of blue cheese dressing onto her salad. "Hey, girls. What's up?" she asked. Mary had the feeling that she had just been the subject of their whispered conversation. She twisted the blackvel vet scrunchy that held her reddish hair in a neat ponytail. "Nothing much," she said.

Kimmy sensed the awkward tension between her friends. She grabbed her pink suede purse and pulled out a crumpled ten-dollar bill. "I have *got* to go get a diet soda. I'm practically dying of thirst. See you in a few."

Mary wondered what she was doing, sitting there at the table. Her new friends certainly didn't feel like true-blue pals today. In fact, they almost never did. It was like walking on a tightrope every day. You never knew who was going to be mad at who, or why.

Mary spotted a group of scraggly, misfit girls in the corner watching the action at her table with envy. If they only knew how unstable it was hanging with the popular kids, being a popular kid, they'd want to stay right where they were, Mary thought.

Shannon's little heart-shaped barrettes gleamed under the fluorescent lights. "So, Mary. What's the latest?" she asked.

Mary couldn't say the word *nothing* again, and she certainly didn't want to talk about the fact that Josh hadn't asked her out yet. She felt like she was losing the myste rious appeal that had gotten her into this elite social circle. She had to think of something interesting to say... and fast. She lowered her voice to a dramatic whisper. "The weirdest thing happened to me last night."

Shannon set down her plastic fork and leaned in closer. She looked as if she were going to start taking notes. "Oh yeah?" she coaxed.

Mary smiled to herself. Now that she had the spotlight, she turned on the California accent, full volume. "Yeah. Oh my gosh. I was in my closet, looking for something, and my favorite bracelet fell between the floorboards! You know the chunky eighteen-karat one I always wear?"

Tanya let out a loud, exaggerated yawn. "Thrilling," she said icily.

Shannon shot Tanya a warning look. She turned to Mary. "Go on."

Mary continued, "Well. The bracelet disappeared into the floorboards and I had to pry up an old piece of wood to see where it had gone. It was really dark and I reached down there, under the house." She paused for effect.

Shannon was sitting on the edge of her seat. "Yeah? So what happened?"

Mary looked into Tanya's narrowed eyes. "I felt a cold draft blowing down there. I mean, really cold. And then I heard something. Something was under the house...."

"And then..." Mary suddenly grabbed Shannon's and Tanya's hands. The girls screamed.

Shannon snatched her hand away from Mary's firm grasp. "You dork! You scared me to death!" she cried. She began laughing hysterically. "That was a good one!"

Tanya composed herself. "You're not funny," she said seriously. "How can you even joke about something like that when you *live* in the house from hell?"

Mary was sick and tired of Tanya's attitude problem. She was pretty on the outside, but her snobby aura made her difficult to hang out with most of the time. "Lighten up," Mary snapped. "At least I don't have the *personality* from hell."

Anger flashed in Tanya's eyes. "Well, if you don't like it, maybe you should just leave," she said coldly.

"Chill out, you two! People are looking at us," Shannon hissed.

Tanya glared at Mary. "Whatever!"

Kimmy returned and took a gulp of her diet soda. "Can you just feel the *love* at this table?" she said sarcastically. "What is *with* you

guys today?"

Shannon glanced at Tanya. "Nothing," she said with a smirk.

Kimmy pointed at the cafeteria window. "Ooooh. Don't look now, girls, but *check it out!*"

The girls slowly turned around. Josh Pinder was walking toward the cafeteria doors. Mary sucked in her breath.

He is too good-looking to be real, Mary thought.

Josh Pinder's dark blond hair hung loosely around his perfect face. His hands were in the pockets of his faded jeans, which were just snug enough to show off his incredible body. Josh smiled crookedly through the window, revealing that set of perfect pearly whites. *He* was perfect.

And he was coming toward her!

She felt dizzy and light-headed as he gave her a little wave.

Mary could feel her face turning red. The girls were staring at her, especially Tanya. Shannon and Kimmy started giggling.

Mary wished she could disappear somewhere to get it together before she started stammering or doing something equally embarrassing.

Mary listened to the trickle of hellos directed toward Josh as he walked past tables of kids in the cafeteria.

Josh's light, fresh cologne arrived a split second before he did. Mary felt a chill as the sleeve of his fleecy red flannel shirt brushed against her wrist when he squeezed in next to her at the crowded table.

"Hello, ladies," Josh said, an ear-to-ear grin on his face. Before Mary could respond, Tanya gave him a wink with her frosty blue eyes. Her voice became sickeningly sweet. "Hi, Josh. Mary here was just telling us a disgusting little story about the ghost in her house." She lowered her voice as if she were sharing some intimate secret with him. "Did you know that she actually *lives* in the Old Myers Place?"

Mary wanted to reach across the table and strangle Tanya! It suddenly became obvious to her that Tanya was jealous and was trying to make a fool of her. But Mary was smarter than to let a cheap shot like that push her buttons.

She forced herself to laugh as Josh turned to face her. "Yeah?" he asked. "What happened?"

With a hint of sarcasm in her voice, Mary said, "You know Michael Myers! It's almost Halloween and he hasn't found a date yet. So he asked me out last night. And I said to him, 'Get real, buddy! I like my men wild and crazy, but not in the *literal* sense!'"

Everyone broke up in laughter except Tanya, who fired a vicious look at Mary.

Josh's eyes were lit up with amusement. "You are so funny, Mary!" He laughed, then dramatically clasped her hand in his. "Please don't go out with Michael Myers. I'd just die of jealousy! Go out with me on Halloween. I promise, I won't go postal or anything."

Mary was shocked and exhilarated all at the same time. He was still holding her hand. It felt so warm and nice. She couldn't believe he'd just asked her out right here in front of everybody! Her stomach fluttered as she felt the eyes of her friends watching.

"Hmmmmmm," she said playfully. "I'll have to think about the pros and cons of my dating options. Let's see. You're alive. That's good. He's a zombie. Could be boring. You've got a reputation as a lady-killer; he's got a reputation as a serial killer."

Josh laughed. "Come on, Mary. I want you to be my date at the Halloween party on Saturday night."

Shannon chimed in, "Halloween party? Whose Halloween party?"

Josh smiled proudly. "Mine. My parents decided to go into New York City for the weekend. I am officially the man of the house." He looked at Mary hopefully. "So are you coming with me or what?"

"Sure," she replied. "It sounds like a blast!"

Josh scooted a little closer to her. "Oh. It will be. We'll have a really good time." He kissed her hand with his full lips, which sent a chill down Mary's spine. Then he gave her a smile and glanced at his watch. "Gotta go, girls. I've got people to see and things to do." He stood up and winked at Mary. "Maybe I'll catch you later. You know, we could get together before Halloween or something," he suggested.

He is so gorgeous! Mary thought.

"Yeah. Okay." She smiled.

Josh gave her his trademark crooked grin. "I'll call you later."



Shannon rolled her eyes and whispered, "Famous last words!"

Kimmy squealed as Josh left the table. "Oh my God!" she breathed enviously. "You are so lucky, Mary. I've never seen him ask out a girl in public! He practically begged you!"

Tanya stood up. She looked really angry. "Luck has nothing to do with it," she blurted out. "He's only interested in your reputation."

"What!" Mary cried. "What are you talking about?"

Tanya spat out her words like venom. "Everyone knows that girls from Los Angeles are *easy*."

Kimmy's cute little face became twisted with fury, a side of her Mary had never seen. "How dare you say that to Mary!" she defended. "You should be talking! You're the one who's always bragging about all the guys you date!"

Tanya slammed her lunch tray on the table. "Well, least I can get a date, Kimmy!" she shouted, staring angrily at her.

Kimmy grabbed Mary's hand. "Come on. Let's get away from this psycho!"

Shannon stopped them, feeling awkwardly divided between her friends. "Come on, you guys. Knock it off. You're all acting like complete idiots."

Tanya stood up and smoothed her black miniskirt over her long legs. She looked as if she were going to burst into tears. "I'm sorry," she whispered as she ran out of the cafeteria.

Mary let out a long, low whistle. "Whoa! What is her problem today?"

"Duh!" Shannon said. "She's crushing hard on Josh and he just asked you out instead of her! You're going to have to get used to the jealousy if you go out with the Joshster. It comes with the territory."

Mary sighed guiltily. "I feel terrible. I had no idea she was so infatuated with him. Maybe I should call it off."

"No," Kimmy told her. "She'll get over it. She'll be drooling over someone else by tomorrow afternoon."

"Yeah, really," Shannon said. "Don't worry about Tanya. You should be worrying more about your date with Josh."

Mary gave her a confused look. "What do you mean?"

Kimmy and Shannon giggled. As if she were talking to a child, Kimmy informed her, "Mary! *Josh* is the one with a nasty reputation around here."

Shannon whispered, "He's known for *always* getting his way, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah, Mary, you'd better be careful," Kimmy warned her. "I've seen the aftermath of his love life, and it's not very pretty."

"All's fair in love and war," Mary stated. She undid her ponytail and tossed her crimped hair back. "Besides, it's not like I haven't gone out with his type before. Los Angeles is crawling with gorgeous guys just like Josh. I can handle him, and anyone else that happens to come along, for that matter."

"Well, I just hope you're as big a girl as you say you are," Shannon said.

"Thanks for the advice, *Mommy*," Mary laughed.

Shannon stood up and stretched, revealing her belly button. "It's been real. I'll catch you guys later," she said.

Kimmy grabbed her bag and followed Shannon, explaining, "I've got to go find my history book before next period. See you later, Mary."

Mary gave them a little wave. She knew that they were going off to discuss what had just happened.

But she didn't care. She had a date with the most sought after guy in school.

Mary took a victorious bite of her tuna sandwich. She was starving.

As Mary was eating the last fragments of her potato chips, she suddenly had the feeling that she was being watched.

She glanced around the cafeteria, but no one appeared to be looking at her. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw a face peering through the window. But when she turned around to look, the face was gone.

"Weird," she mumbled.

Mary decided that she should get going. Her algebra class started in ten minutes, and they were going to be taking a test today. She stuffed her lunch sack into her black, leather backpack and slung it

over her shoulder. A few kids said hi to her as she made her way toward the cafeteria doors.

Mary remembered the face that had been watching her. She made a point to study the kids hanging out by the cafeteria window to see who it had been.

"Oh great," Mary mumbled when she saw her cousin Julie, or "Julifer," which was her Gothic name and the one she insisted the family call her by. She and another girl were sitting on the brick wall beside the window. Mary and Julifer definitely didn't get along. Julifer was a sophomore and totally into the alternative music scene. Ever since Mary had shown up in town with her new, clean-cut looks, Julifer had branded her a geek and a sellout.

Julifer was sitting with her friend Michelle, who had a puke-green Mohawk and a nose ring. Michelle sneered at Mary as she slyly took a puff of a clove cigarette. She handed it to Julifer, who had her bleached white hair all ratted out and her eyes caked with black makeup.

Mary gave the girls a polite smile.

Michelle snuffed out the smoke and scowled threateningly at Mary. "What are you looking at, *prom queen*?" she growled.

Julifer opened her black trench coat to reveal a neon green minidress, which she wore over a pair of ripped fish net stockings. "Maybe the Barbie doll wants a few fashion tips!" she jeered. "How's it going, Cuz?" Mary smiled to herself, as if remembering something.

Michelle and Julifer stared dumbly at Mary, waiting for her to say something. Mary nodded. "Hi, Julifer. I was just looking for someone," she said casually.

Michelle pointed her spiky green hair toward Mary. "Well, you're looking on the wrong side of the glass, baby! Don't you know that stuck-up, rich little twits like you don't belong out here? This is freak territory!"

Mary was intrigued by the two girls and forgot all about looking for whoever had been spying on her. "Oh yeah? Well, go ahead and fly your freak flag. Do your magic, do your voodoo, follow me, girl, and do what I do."

Julifer instantly recognized the song lyrics. "Hey, Mary. How'd you know that song by the Electric Voodoo Skulls?" she asked suspiciously.

Michelle jumped off the wall and brushed some dust off the seat of her plaid pants. "She probably read about it in *Teeny Bopper* magazine," she said. The girl rolled her eyes and threw her hands up in the air. "Is nothing sacred?"

Sneering, Mary said, "I went to their concert last summer, and I even went backstage. But you small-town dorks wouldn't know about stuff like that. The closest thing you've ever seen to a concert is the church choir. You guys are soooooo five years ago!"

Michelle stroked her Mohawk and snorted, "Yeah! Right! And I'm Mother Teresa!"

Julifer scowled at Mary and looked at Michelle. "She used to have black hair and looked halfway decent." She blinked her heavily made-up eyes. "She used to be cool," she said, cringing at Mary's wholesome appearance. "But that was *before* she moved out here and turned over a new leaf."

Mary shot Julifer a warning look, "Shut up, Julifer. I mean it."

Julifer snickered, knowing that she had major dirt on her cousin. She knew the whole story, the one that would for ever tarnish Mary's reputation with her new buddies. A single slip of the lip and Mary and her new life in Haddonfield were history. "Don't worry, cousin. My lips are sealed."

Michelle studied Mary's face closely. She pointed to Mary's ear, which had a single diamond stud through below a line of seven barely visible earring holes. "She's a sellout," she cackled abrasively. "She moved to a small town and was too afraid to be herself. Am I right?"

Mary felt awkward and wished she hadn't bothered to say hello to her obnoxious relative. "Maybe, maybe not." she said. "I'll see you guys around."

Mary turned to leave, but Julifer followed her. "Hey. I was just kidding around back there. Don't let Michelle's attitude get to you. I think I understand where you're coming from. People in this town

can be pretty mean if you look different than they do. Believe me. I know."

Mary gave her a half smile. "Yeah. Whatever. My freaky days are over. But thanks for the sympathy. See you at Thanksgiving dinner."

A pair of cheerleaders Mary knew walked by. "Hi, Cindy. Hi, Brenda." Mary waved.

The two cheerleaders totally ignored Mary and took a double take at Julifer's wild, ratted hair. They began whispering and giggling to themselves as they bounced off.

"What!" Mary called out to them. "Do I have the plague or something!"

Julifer lowered her head, "I'd better take off. We don't want people to think we're hanging out or anything." She laughed halfheartedly, "My friends would die if they knew I was talking to someone like you. I'd be the laughing stalk of the Gothic scene!"

Mary nodded in mutual agreement, remembering that freaks and soches mix about as well as oil and water. "Yeah. I'll see you around."

Julifer gave her a wink and ducked in between a row of lockers.

Mary walked to her locker and spun the combination. Despite the hundreds of chattering students who poured through on their way to class, it was chilly in the hallway. Mary remembered her date with Josh and smiled to herself. She wondered if he would actually call her like he'd said he would.

Mary pulled her binder notebook and algebra book from the locker. She was about to turn around when she suddenly felt a pair of eyes watching her from behind. A creepy feeling stuck with her until she finally spun around.

"Jeff!" she said with a sigh.

Jeff Wayland, her ex-boyfriend, was standing there, staring at her. He was wearing his standard pair of faded jeans and a paint-splattered navy sweatshirt. His dark blond hair was hanging in his stormy blue eyes. She remembered how their brief summer romance had gone sour just before school started. How weird and moody he was. How he'd broken up with her. The anger welled up inside.

His face became red, as if he'd just been caught doing something illegal, and his voice cracked as he said, "Hi, Mary."

Mary slammed her locker shut and turned away from him. "Hello," she said unemotionally.

Jeff didn't move. He stuffed his hands in his pockets and swayed slightly. He cleared his throat. "Mary, I heard you're dating Josh Pinder. I just wanted to—"

Mary's stomach tightened into a knot. Did the whole school know? She spun around furiously. "Who I date is none of your *freaking* business, Jeff! Just leave me alone!"

Mary stalked off. How dare he even mention Josh's name! she thought.

Jeff called out, finishing his sentence. "I just wanted to warn you!"

Mary stopped and turned around. Jeff was leaning against a row of lockers with a concerned look on his face.

"Stay away from him. He's dangerous," he whispered just loud enough for her to hear. He looked down at his worn work boots and walked away.

*Dangerous?*

Of all the psychotic, strange things to say! What is his problem anyway? she wondered. He must be jealous, she rationalized. He's sorry that he blew it with me.

# CHAPTER

## 3

The next morning Mary pulled her red convertible into the school parking lot. She always arrived early to get a decent parking space. She turned off the ignition and sat there for a while eating a blueberry muffin she'd picked up at Greta's Bakery. It was really cold outside today and she wasn't looking forward to the walk down to campus. "I'll bet it's seventy-five degrees in Los Angeles right now," she mumbled, suddenly longing for the perfect Southern California weather she was accustomed to.

Mary was startled by a horn that blared from behind. In her rearview mirror, she caught a glimpse of Shannon's black BMW. The black car swung into a parking space a few yards away. Shannon was wearing a chocolate-colored wool coat and a matching pair of fur-lined gloves. She tapped on Mary's window. "Hey, girlfriend. Are you going to just sit there?" she asked.

Mary smiled and got out of the car. She snuggled into her tan suede jacket and locked her car. "Hi, Shannon. What's happening?" she asked.

"I should be asking you what's happening," Shannon said distantly. "*So, what's the deal?*" she asked. Her heated words hung in the chilly air.

Uh-oh, Mary thought. Something's up. Shannon always asked vague questions when she was upset.

"Can you be a little more specific?" Mary asked unknowingly. "What exactly do you want to know?"

Shannon stopped walking and pulled Mary in between two parked cars. She looked around to make sure no one was listening, then whispered, "I heard that you were hanging out with the *freaks* yesterday after lunch!"

The way she'd said the word *freaks*, with such disgust and conviction, frightened Mary a little. She laughed nervously, figuring the two cheerleaders who'd passed by when she was talking to Julifer had said something. "Oh?" Mary responded.

Shannon was dead silent, searching Mary's face for a more elaborate explanation.

Mary wanted to tell her off right there for being so shallow, but changed her mind. She feared being all alone in a new school. She thought fast, then let out a light laugh. "Oh! That!" She explained, "I was just doing a little research for my psychology class. You know? I decided to interview my cousin and her friend for my midterm project."

Shannon's expression suddenly became friendly and she began howling with laughter. "What a great idea! That is so funny!" she said.

Mary forced herself to smile back, but felt like a real phony. Michelle, the green-haired punk, had been right.

Her harsh words echoed in Mary's mind.

*You're a sellout.*

Mary followed Shannon down the path toward school and listened to her lecture about social status and how people like themselves should never socialize with losers, freaks, punks, and geeks.

The landscaping was covered in frost. Mary shivered, "Thanks for the pointers, Shannon. I'll be sure to wear a sign on my back that says 'Media' next time I talk to them."

Shannon's expression was puzzled for a moment, and then she gave Mary a soft slug on the arm. "Media! You crack me up. I'll see you later."

Mary stopped at her locker to get books for the next few classes. She was thinking about Shannon and how fragile their friendship was—if you could even call it a friendship.

Shannon had real money and a sort of blue-blood, inbred snobbiness about her. She had told Mary all about her debutante coming-out party on her sixteenth birthday. Mary had thought that things like that only existed in the movies. But as it turned out, Tanya had been given one too.

Mary's thoughts were interrupted by Josh Pinder, who suddenly appeared by her side. He wore an expensive ivory sweater that contrasted fabulously against the gold tones in his hair and skin. He



was smiling at her. Josh pushed her locker door shut to get her full attention.

Mary remembered Jeff's warning: Josh was dangerous. In fact, Kimmy and Shannon had also told her to be careful around him, she thought.

But Josh certainly didn't look dangerous right now. In fact, he looked as safe and as cuddly as her favorite teddy bear.

"Hi, Mary," he said confidently. His breath smelled like crisp peppermint.

Mary felt her cheeks burning and wished she had been a little more prepared for this surprise meeting. "Hi, Josh. How's it going?"

The bell rang. Josh glanced at the large clock in the hallway. "Fine," he answered. "Do you want to go get some chow with me tonight? I thought you'd like to go down to Rose's Diner."

"Yeah. That sounds like fun," she gushed, wishing that she'd responded a little less enthusiastically. *It's not like you've never been out on a date before*, Mary silently scolded herself.

Josh raked a hand through his perfectly styled hair. "Great. I'll pick you up at seven?" he asked.

Mary nodded coolly. "Okay. Let me give you my address."

Josh rolled his eyes. "I *know* where you live. The Old Myers Place. In fact, everyone in town knows where you live. Your house is practically a historical landmark!" he teased.

Mary wished everyone would stop referring to her house as the Old Myers Place. Why couldn't they just forget about Michael Myers, about the Bogeyman. It was *her* house now. But she guessed Josh hadn't meant to insult her. She smiled. "Right. I'll see you later."

"See ya," Josh said with a wave as he ran down the hall.

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Mary made it to homeroom just as the final bell rang. She took her seat next to Tanya, who looked the other way when she saw her.

It was just as well, Mary thought, after the way Tanya had insulted her yesterday.

Suddenly, Tanya tapped Mary on the shoulder. "I'm really sorry about what I said yesterday," she apologized. "I was way out of line."

Mary turned to look at Tanya, not believing that she'd lowered herself to say she was sorry. Tanya's burgundy wool sweater matched her cranberry-stained lips, which had curled into a little smile.

Mary smiled back, wondering why Tanya was suddenly being so nice. "No problem," she said.

"Great," Tanya said sweetly. "I'd just hate for us to be enemies over such a stupid little incident." She batted her eyelashes. "So everything's cool then?" she asked.

What did she want, wondered Mary. A formal apology acceptance? "Yeah. Everything's fine."

"I'm so glad you said that," Tanya told her. A spark of mischief flashed in her eyes. "I guess I won't have to blackmail you after all."

Silent alarm bells went off in Mary's head. Was she joking? Did she know something about Mary's less-than perfect past?

Mary remembered that her cousin Julifer knew everything about her past through the family grapevine. But she didn't think that Julifer held it against her.

Or did she?

And if she did, had she opened her big mouth?

Mary steadied her expression so that she wouldn't reveal the panic that had invaded her brain. "Blackmail? You're kidding. Right?"

Mary didn't like the evil glimmer that seemed to lurk deep within Tanya's eyes as she smiled mysteriously and said, "What are you so worried about? Has Mary, Mary quite contrary got something to hide?"

The stony expression on Tanya's face gave away nothing.

*What if she knows?*

Her new life could be instantly ruined by Tanya's loose lips. What if she'd found out about the arrest or if she'd somehow seen a picture of Mary's former punk getup. They'd never understand. Even though she'd left her old life behind and was a completely clean, new person, the straitlaced kids out here would never be able to comprehend what she'd been through.

Tanya was still wearing a knowing little smile.

Mary was about to explain how she'd been at the wrong place at the wrong time when the drug bust went down. How her boyfriend back in L.A. had been a drug addict. How he'd sold some speed to an undercover narcotics agent that night when they'd left the nightclub. How Mary had been arrested on suspicion of dealing drugs. How she'd spent that horrible night in jail...

Tanya waved her ring-covered fingers before Mary's blank face. Mary remembered how ashamed her parents had been of her. How she'd given up the punk scene for good after the experience.

Tanya whispered, "Hello? Anyone home? Mary? I was just kidding. Are you okay?"

Mary snapped back into present time. "Yeah." She nervously twisted the fringe on her suede jacket and forced herself to smile. "I'm fine. I was just thinking about my algebra class. I hope I did well on my test yesterday," she bluffed.

Tanya twisted one of her jeweled rings. "Don't you think you're being a little too serious, Mary? It's only math. For a minute there I thought you were going to admit that you used to be an ax murderer, or a dope dealer!" she snickered.

Mary crinkled her nose. "Yeah. Right."

# CHAPTER

## 4

Mary brushed her hair with long strokes in front of the mirror of her white wicker vanity. Josh would be here in fifteen minutes, and she wasn't even dressed yet.

Mary had been to Rose's Diner lots of times since she'd moved to Haddonfield. All the local kids hung out there at night, eating their to-die-for burgers and playing pool. But she'd never gone there on a date.

Mary was pretty certain that she'd run into lots of people from school tonight who would be watching her with scrutinous eyes. After all, everyone seemed to keep up with Josh's love affairs, as if he were the star of his own soap opera.

Mary selected a comfortable pair of faded jeans and a green sweater from her dresser drawer. The emerald-colored sweater always made her eyes stand out like rare jewels. She wanted to look good tonight, but not too dressed up, as if she'd made a big effort.

Mary stepped into her closet and dug out a pair of black leather boots. An icy draft breathed through the decaying old floorboards. Mary shivered, remembering that she still had to go down there to look for her lost bracelet. Luckily her parents hadn't noticed that it was missing yet. She quickly laced up her boots and closed the closet door.

A horn honked outside.

Mary peeked through the lacy curtains of her bedroom window and saw Josh sitting in the driver's seat of his black Porsche. The exhaust from the sleek sports car formed a cloud in the chilly evening air. She could hear a loud blast of music coming from his ultraexpensive stereo system. Mary's heart thudded with excitement as he revved the engine. Her noble escort had arrived.

Mary maintained a cool, collected composure as she crossed the frost-covered lawn. Josh stepped out and opened the passenger door for her, looking as if he could have been a young TV star.

"My lady." He bowed majestically.

Mary giggled at his exaggerated gesture of gentlemanliness. "Thank you, *sir*." She giggled, then she sank into the butter-soft leather seat and stole a glimpse at Josh.

He really does look like Brad Pitt, Mary thought.

Josh flashed Mary a crooked grin and punched the accelerator. The car responded, blasting off with rocket force. Mary sat back and enjoyed the fast ride. She watched Josh's hands deftly shift gears and maneuver the steering wheel as they wove down the winding roads toward town.

Mary ran her hand across the black dashboard. "Nice car," she said over the loud rock music. *Nice everything*, she thought.

Josh nodded casually. He was rich. *Very rich*. His father owned a large chemical plant that supplied all of the major cosmetics companies with their raw materials. She wondered if her shampoo had been made with products from Pinder Industries.

Josh smiled. "Thanks. My dad bought it for me for getting good grades. He's hell-bent on shipping me off to Harvard so I can get a master's degree in business and take over the company at some point."

Mary asked, "Is that what you want to do with your life?"

"Why not?" he responded. "It's all set up, and I'll be set for life. Yeah, I'm going to own it all someday."

Mary nodded her head. It must be nice to have your whole life planned out for you, to never have to worry about your future, she thought enviously.

Josh said, "So. What do you want to do with your life, Mary?"

Mary had thought about that question many times, and still didn't have any idea. "I don't know yet. I haven't figured it out."

The Porsche blew past the tree-covered forest. The lights of downtown Haddonfeld twinkled over the horizon. Josh turned down the stereo and looked intently at Mary. "So why'd you decide to go out with me?" he asked.

The question caught Mary off guard. She swallowed hard, not quite sure how to answer. "What?" she asked, stalling.

Josh repeated himself, "Why are you here with me? I mean, what makes you want to go out with a guy like me?"

Mary wrinkled her brow, wondering what he was getting at. "Are you fishing for compliments?" she asked.

Josh leaned back in his seat and slowed the car a little.

"No. I just like to know what you're thinking. You know, what turns you on, what makes you tick."

Mary shrugged her shoulders, figuring an honest answer would be best. "I guess I just wanted to get to know you a little better. I mean, we've been friends for a while, but I don't really know you." She cleverly reversed the uncomfortable subject. "Why did you ask me out?" she asked, glumly remembering Tanya's comment about her bad reputation.

Josh smiled confidently. "Because you're pretty and you're funny. You're about the only girl at school with a personality." He added, "And you're mysterious. You're the new girl from L.A. who lives in the Old Myers Place The whole package is so intriguing. I want to unwrap you like I'd tear open a giant box on my birthday!"

Mary choked. "Excuse me?"

Josh corrected himself. "I mean, I want to know more about you." He explained, "Around here, everyone knows everything about everybody. But you, you come from another world. I want to know everything about you—what you've done, where you've been, and what you've seen."

Mary joked, "Well I never *unwrap* on a first date."

Josh swung the car into a parking space at Rose's Diner. The red neon sign cast a pink glow on his handsome face. He leaned across the seat. "Can I at least untie the ribbon?" he asked.

Before she could think, Mary felt her head nodding *yes*. Josh's soft lips pressed against hers. She closed her eyes, savoring the brief, delicious moment.

Josh pulled away and smiled. "That just was a peek at the gift tag. And I liked what it said."

"Yeah," Mary admitted. "Me too."

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Josh held Mary's hand loosely and led her into the packed diner. The red vinyl booths were crowded with kids. Everyone was talking and laughing over the loud music that blared down from several television screens tuned to MTV.

Someone might as well have pulled the power plugs as the couple walked across the room. Everyone stopped talking for an uncomfortable moment, sizing up Josh's date.

Josh slid into a small corner table, and Mary followed. No one was staring anymore, but Mary could feel occasional glances and hear muffled whispers. Over the noise, she heard someone at the next table ask, "Is that Josh's new girlfriend?"

Mary turned around to see who it was, but saw only a tableful of girls she didn't know smiling back at her.

This small town stuff is pretty weird, she thought. If we were in L.A. right now, no one would even give us a second look. We'd just be lost in a sea of faces.

Mary picked up a menu and hid behind the laminated list of greasy selections. She'd never felt so awkward in her whole life.

Josh peeled off his leather jacket and yelled over the music, "I guess this wasn't such a great place for a first date. Let's eat and get out of here."

Mary was relieved. "Okay," she agreed.

Josh ordered two burger specials and two sodas. Mary hoped that the service would be fast tonight.

Mary turned to see Shannon and Kimmy enter the diner. They stopped at the pool table to flirt with a group of football players. Mary was actually happy that they were there, even though she knew they'd most likely come to spy on Josh and her. She stood up and waved until Kimmy saw her.

"Do girls always travel in packs?" Josh asked, a little annoyed.

"Only when there are wolves around," Mary joked.

Josh's irritated tone melted and he smiled wickedly. "Awooooooooo!" he howled. He stood up and took an animated little bow as almost every girl in the room giggled.

Mary blushed as she realized that every eyeball in the place was watching them again. She quickly got up and sat down next to Josh

to make room for Shannon and Kimmy who were laughing as they approached the table.

Shannon's mint-green pants and shirt clashed trendily with her purple nail polish. She dropped her clear plastic purse on the table. "Hey, guys. Are we interrupting anything? I thought I heard the call of the wild over here?" she said.

Kimmy jokingly yanked on Shannon's hair, which was tied back in immature little ponytails. "Shannon!" she scolded. "Can you ever be quiet for five minutes straight?"

Shannon sat down and replied, "Communication makes the world go round!"

"Then that must make you the Earth's main power source!" Mary said with a laugh.

"Ha-ha. Very funny," Shannon said, snickering. She turned to Josh. "We just invited a few guys on the football team to your Halloween bash. You don't mind, right?"

"That's cool," Josh told her. He glanced around the room. "Just be careful not to spread the word to any *losers* or *freshmen*. Got it?"

"As *if* we know any losers!" Kimmy exclaimed. "*Please!*"

The food arrived at the table. Mary saw Kimmy enviously eyeing her fries. She nodded, and Kimmy grabbed a greasy handful.

Shannon pointed to the football players by the pool table. She whispered, "The jocks over there said that Mary should be a cheerleader. Wouldn't that just be a riot?"

Mary challenged lightheartedly, "Oh yeah? You think I couldn't do it?"

"Yeah, right! I can just see you now, wearing a Haddonfield High sweater and pleated skirt up to your belly button!" Shannon howled.

Before she realized what she was doing, Mary stood up on the table, began to shake an imaginary pair of pom poms, and screamed, "Two, four, six, eight! I'm the girl you love to hate! Zero, one, two three! Don't you wish that you were me! Yeaaaaaaa, cheerleaders!"

Josh, Kimmy, and Shannon were doubled over with laughter, along with nearly everyone else in the diner. Shannon was nearly choking on her soda. "You are such a geek, Mary!" she snorted.



Everyone was cracking up as Kimmy gave Mary a spirited high five. "You go, girl!" she yelled.

Josh threw his head back in laughter. "You have got *nerve*, Mary!" He put his arm around her. "Where'd you get your personality?"

"The Barbizon School of Modeling. Where else?" she joked.

Josh nudged Mary. "I think she'd be the hottest babe on the squad," he said. "In fact, I might even join the football team if Mary was in a skimpy costume cheering for me."

Mary took a bite of her juicy burger, a little embarrassed by Josh's compliment.

Kimmy imitated a sports announcer. "And here comes Josh Pinder, number nineteen! He's going for the touchdown, but wait! What's going on? He's running toward the sidelines! He's dropped the ball and is chasing one of the cheerleaders! He's officially entered the Football Hall of Shame!"

Josh laughed hard and looked at Mary, who seemed to be having a great time. He pointed at a giant glob of catsup that had dripped onto her sweater.

Mary cursed. "Shoot!" She grabbed a napkin and tried to wipe it off.

"Where's Tanya?" Josh suddenly asked.

*Why is he thinking about Tanya?* Mary wondered jealously. *This is supposed to be our date!*

"She's out with Rob," Shannon said. Rob Wheeler was captain of the basketball team. She added, "He's probably scored a three-pointer with her by now!"

The insult made Mary giggle as she dabbed water on the stain. But then she wondered if Shannon talked behind her back like that too. Shannon had a strange way of discussing her "friends" when they weren't around.

By the frown on Josh's face, Mary could tell that he wasn't amused by Shannon's wisecrack.

Mary nudged Josh, who was picking the shredded lettuce off his burger. "Hey," she said.

Josh seemed lost in his thoughts. "Hey," he mimicked, giving her a smile.

The stain wasn't coming out of Mary's sweater. "I'll be right back, you guys. I'm going to try to rinse off this spot with some hot water."

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Satisfied that the catsup was out, Mary flipped her hair over the wet spot before exiting the bathroom. As she made her way across the restaurant toward the table, she suddenly froze in mid-step. The familiar music seemed to pump louder and louder. Her heart thumped along with the wild beat and screeching lyrics. It was the Electric Voodoo Skulls video.

She looked at Josh, who was chatting with Shannon and Kimmy.

Nearly everyone in the place was gawking at the screen and laughing. You couldn't help but stare at the screeching lead singer, who had a pasty white face and long black dreadlocks.

Excitement was flashing in Josh's eyes. "Let's get out of here," he suggested.

Mary was more than ready to leave the diner and chill out somewhere. "Let's go," she agreed.

Shannon blew a little kiss at Mary and Josh. "Have fun, you guys," she cooed. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

Josh smirked. "You mean like wearing a pair of those green polyester duds you're in? No thanks!"

Shannon smiled smugly and gave him the finger.

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On their way out, Josh scooped Mary into his arms and carried her through the front door of the diner, which set off another wave of laughter inside.

Josh set Mary on the ground by his Porsche and opened the passenger door. "You are so cool," he stated. "I may have met my match."

Mary smiled, got in the car, and stared up at the gleaming moon through the tinted windows. "You're pretty cool too," she said. "I'm glad we've shared this interesting night together."

"Don't make it sound so formal." He laughed. "That's what I like best about you—you're wild and crazy, just like me. Everyone else is so boring around here."

She wondered what he meant by *wild and crazy*. Just how wild and crazy was he? How far would he go for a good laugh?

"You want to see my boat?" he asked. "It's docked on the lake."

His boat? What would we do on his boat at this time of night? she wondered. Only one thought came to mind.

Josh had this intense look in his eyes. Mary shook her head. "I don't think so. Maybe some other time."

Josh started the engine of his car. "Oh. Come on. I promise to behave like a perfect gentleman." He cocked his head to one side and looked as innocent as a puppy. "I'm really into boats, and want to show you mine."

Mary laughed to herself, thinking that the boat probably wasn't the only thing he wanted to show her. But he *did* look pretty harmless and he was *such a babe*. She decided that she could handle him if things started to get out of hand.

"Okay," she finally said with a sigh. "But I've got to be home by nine."

# CHAPTER

## 5

The lake was still and quiet except for a few gentle ripples. The bright moonlight shone peacefully upon the black water. Several lonely-looking boats bobbed up and down.

Josh pulled the car up to the dock and the couple got out. Josh selected a golden key from the ring, twisted it in the lock of the iron security gate, and gestured for Mary to enter. He held the door for her and followed, letting the heavy door crash shut behind them. Josh squeezed her hand as he led her down the chunky wooden dock.

"Which one is it?" Mary asked, looking out at the spectacular boats.

Josh pointed to a large houseboat in the last slip. "Over there. That's the *SS Pinder*," he said proudly. "I come here a lot. Sometimes I fish, but most of the time I just kick back. "It's so quiet and isolated up here."

"Wow," she said breathlessly. "It's...I mean, she's beautiful."

Mary stepped aboard the impressively large boat. She breathed in the fresh, cool air and made a silent wish that things would work out between the two of them. It would be so fab to have a great-looking guy with his own boat, she thought. She fantasized about the two of them still together next summer, sunbathing on the deck.

Mary stood on the deck, gazing out over the rail into the blackness of the lake. Tall pine trees and bending willows surrounded the water's every edge. Tiny lights from the lakeside houses twinkled and glowed magically in the reflection of the water.

Josh disappeared into the cabin below and flipped on a few lights. "Come on down!" he called.

Mary grabbed the handrail and followed the steps. Josh was looking for something in the cabinets. Mary sat down on the freshly upholstered bench and looked around at the cute, maritime decor. Everything was done in matching blue and white.

"Would you like some hot tea?" he asked as he pulled a couple of mugs from a shelf.

"I'd love some," Mary answered. "I just love hot tea. I drink about four cups a day, except for today. I think I only had one cup with my toast this morning."

*Stop babbling, Mary*, she scolded herself. *Just chill out.*

Josh filled a couple of ceramic mugs with water and popped them in the miniature microwave oven. "Well, I'm glad to know that you're an avid tea drinker," he said.

Mary blushed, feeling like an awkward geek sitting there with nothing to say.

Josh sat down across from her and stretched his long legs across the bench. He always seemed to be totally at ease, she thought. She guessed that anyone who was as rich, popular, and handsome as he was would feel pretty confident. Mary noticed how huge his feet were for the first time.

"So. How's it been living in the Old Myers Place?" he asked her.

Mary shrugged. "Okay, I guess." She smiled thinly. "But I don't understand why everyone is so fascinated with the place. I mean, it's just a house."

"It's not just a *house* in this town," Josh said. "Most people around here are terrified to even look at it! I mean, it's the place where it all started. Where the Bogeyman was spawned. Where Michael Myers *massacred* his sister."

"Don't remind me," Mary said dryly. "I've been told that my room was where Michael killed his sister."

Josh raised his eyebrows and made a face. "Wow. That's pretty heavy." He got up to take the tea out of the microwave. "Has anything weird happened yet?"

"*Yet?*" Mary repeated.

Josh kept talking as he dipped the tea bags in the water. "You know. Like ghosts appearing or unexplained noises or anything? I mean, they do say it's haunted."

Mary took off her jacket and sighed. At least we're talking about something that interests *him*, she thought. "No. Nothing's happened. It's a perfectly normal house as far as I'm concerned."

Josh handed Mary a mug of steaming tea. "Well, they say that after he escaped from the loony bin he came *home* before he went on his

Halloween massacre, the one where he murdered twelve kids with a butcher knife. I think that was back in 1985 or something. The police filled him with enough lead to kill an entire city! And I'm sure you know about how he came back last Halloween and burned city hall to the ground, then murdered the mayor, a couple of cops, and four kids at the big Halloween party. They could never prove that it was actually Michael Myers, because they never found his body. But everyone who was there will swear that it was him, not some copycat killer. You know, he's still missing...."

"So I've heard." Mary yawned. "Are you trying to freak me out or something?" she asked.

Josh reseated himself and laughed. "I'm sorry. You probably don't want to hear all this stuff, especially now, just a few days before Halloween and all."

"Thanks for the reminder." she said. "Let's talk about something else. Okay?"

"You've got it," Josh said. "How about some music and a game of Chinese checkers?"

Mary was pleasantly surprised by his suggestion. "Great But I'd better warn you. I play a mean game. I hope you're not one of those guys who always has to win," she joked

"Ha!" Josh said with a snort. "That sounds like a challenge."

He flipped on the built-in stereo and tuned the radio to the local rock station. Then he set up the checkerboard and teased, "By the way: I *am* one of those guys. But we don't have to worry about you winning, because I'm going to kick your butt."

"Yeah. Right." Mary laughed.

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Outside in the black shadows of the whispering willows, a dark figure crouched by the edge of the water, watching the boat. A low, menacing growl escaped from his lips. He watched the teenagers through the tiny porthole window as they laughed and talked.

The figure disappeared into the darkness.

\*\*\*

Mary stood up and did a little victory dance to the beat of the song on the radio. "Ha-ha! I won!" she sang. She was feeling totally relaxed and comfortable now that they'd broken the ice.

Josh threw his hands up in the air. "What can I say. You got a lucky break. Let's play best two out of three."

Mary was having a wonderful time, but she'd already told him that she had to be home by nine and it was ten-to now. She felt that it was important to *set* and *stick to* limits with guys like Josh who were used to being swooned over. Even though she really wanted to stay, she knew that playing hard to get would attract him even more.

"Sorry," she told him. "I've got to go home now."

"Come on," he pleaded. "Just one more game?"

"Nope," she said firmly, slipping into her coat. "I can't stay." She watched his disappointed reaction and knew that her scheme was working.

Josh smiled and flipped off the stereo. He didn't want to look like a needy, uncool geek on their first date. "Okay. You win." He corrected himself, "I mean you win *as in* you get to go home. We'll settle the score with the game next time. It's still best two out of three."

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Josh drove a lot slower taking her home than when he'd picked her up. He didn't want the night to be over so early, but reminded himself that he'd see her tomorrow at school. Mary really turned him on, just as he knew she would.

Josh pulled up in Mary's driveway next to her red convertible. "I'll see you tomorrow at school?" he asked. He instantly felt stupid and tongue-tied for asking such an idiotic question.

*Of course you'll see her at school, dummy!* he thought.

Mary's bright eyes sparkled. "Yeah. I'll see you tomorrow."

Josh scrambled to open the passenger door for her. "I really had a good time tonight," he admitted.

"Me too," she whispered. She glanced at her dark house. "Looks like the 'rents are still out," she said.

"You're parents aren't home? You want me to come inside?" he asked. "To make sure no one's hiding in there?"

Mary shook her head. "Nah. I'll be fine. But you can walk me to the door if you want," she offered.

Josh held out his arm and walked her up to the porch. Without asking, he planted a kiss on her lips. A warm tingle traveled down her back, and she allowed herself to enjoy the moment briefly as she kissed him back.

Mary gently pushed him away, although she really didn't want to.

*Play hard to get, Mary*, she reminded herself.

She opened her front door while Josh stood there feeling totally baffled. He was used to getting his way with girls. *All* the girls. He was Josh Pinder, he reminded himself. He was irresistible to the female species.

Mary blew him a little kiss. "Good-night," she said.

As she went to close the door, Josh jammed his foot in the doorway to stop it. He wasn't ready for this date to end yet. He quickly turned on the charm and gave Mary his best smile, the one he practiced every night in the mirror. "Are you sure you don't want me to come inside? Just for a little while?" he asked in his velvety-smooth voice.

A little taken aback by his bold advance, Mary politely said, "No, Josh. My parents will be home any minute. Besides, tomorrow is a school day and I really need to get to bed."

Josh felt like a fool. He couldn't remember the last time a girl had turned him down. Stepping backward, he smiled sheepishly and said, "Okay. See ya, Mary."

Inside the house, Mary leaned against the front door and listened to Josh's footsteps fade down the driveway. She had to hold back a squeal of excitement. As soon as his car pulled away, she victoriously shouted, "Yes!"



# CHAPTER

## 6

Mary ran her hand along the oak railing as she floated up the staircase. Her date with Josh had gone better than she'd planned. He'd practically been drooling over her out on the porch.

Mary gave herself a mental pat on the back and flipped on the light in her bedroom. She flopped backward onto her soft bed and stared up at the crystal light on the ceiling.

She closed her eyes and re-created the good-night kiss in her head. Thoughts of the eventful evening tumbled through her mind. She still couldn't believe that she'd stood up on the table in the diner and that her little cheerleader impersonation had been such a big hit with the conservative teenage population of Haddonfield. A new wave of confidence and self-esteem washed over her.

Maybe life wasn't going to be so bad here after all, she thought. Maybe they'd even nominate her as the prom queen later this year. She imagined herself stepping onto the auditorium stage and taking the crown. Josh would be the king and together they'd be the envy of the school.

\*\*\*

A dark figure emerged from the woods and darted across the street toward the house.

His hot breath hung in the freezing night air as he squatted down, his face hidden in the shadows of the toolshed. His hateful eyes greedily watched the sexy redheaded girl through her bedroom window, lazing about on her bed as if she didn't have a care in the world. A vicious growl escaped from his lips.

A rush of adrenaline pumped through his body as his feet led him around the back of her house. He violently slashed away a thick mass of ivy that clung against the metal power box. With a crude, rusted ax in his filthy hand, he hacked the ribbons of wire loose from their deeply rooted nesting inside the box.

The power groaned off and the house went dark.

The figure silently moved up the steps of the back porch and began tugging on the flimsy screen door.

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Mary sat up on her bed and shrieked when the electricity suddenly snapped off.

She forced herself to stay calm as she groped around for one of her aromatherapy candles. She squinted in the darkness and found a book of matches in her bedside dresser. The tiny orange flame let off a puff of sulfur as she touched it to the wick of an evergreen-scented candle.

Mary cupped the candle in her hands. The flickering light shone eerily around the room. Suddenly her heart thudded heavily as she heard a rattling at the back door.

"Oh God no," she whispered.

Her voice quivered. "Mom? Dad? Is that you?"

Mary panicked. *Of course it's not my parents! They would have used the front door!*

She silently moved across her room and picked up the phone receiver.

A pang of terror shot through her brain as she discovered that the line was dead.

*Oh God! I've got to get out of here!*

The light rattling against the back door swiftly turned into desperate, maniacal pounding. But the loud, forceful thuds were drowned out by the dreadful sound of her furiously pumping heart.

*Is the deadbolt locked? I can't remember....*

Suddenly, the door downstairs crashed open with jarring force. Mary jumped backward and sucked in her breath.

*Help me! Somebody help me!*

Heavy footsteps clunked across the hardwood floor and moved swiftly up the stairs. Before Mary could blow out the candle and hide, she heard her bedroom doorknob rattling.

"No! Noooooo!" she screamed.

She hurled her body against the door and racked her brain for some way to escape the nightmarish situation. Her eyes darted around in the pitch-black darkness, searching for something, anything to use as a weapon.

Mary shrieked and watched in horrified fascination as the weight on the other side of the door buckled the wood inward. With a splitting noise, the lock popped and the door crashed wide open.

In a flash, she dove toward the corner of the room and watched in horror as the huge figure, shrouded in darkness, appeared in the doorway of her bedroom. Her eyes wide with terror, Mary ran to her bedroom window, screaming.

Panic welled up inside as the intruder lurched toward her. She tried to force open the window, but it was sealed shut with paint. Mary opened her mouth to scream again and was instantly cut off by a rough, filthy hand that clamped tightly over her mouth from behind.

Numb with terror, Mary struggled and tried desperately to wriggle free from the intruder's grip. He was really hurting her, and she knew that he wanted her dead. Mary's legs crumbled beneath his crushing weight. His hands clasped around her neck, his fingers digging deeply into her flesh. Mary gasped for air.

*Fight back!*

With a desperate surge of adrenaline, Mary elbowed the intruder as hard as she could in the ribs. Surprised by her strength, the figure slammed backward against the wall and fell to the floor. Wild footsteps, mixed with the sounds of heavy breathing and panting, filled the room. A blur of black shadows and misshapen figures danced around the room in the eerie flicker of the one tiny candle. Something metallic clattered to the floor.

In the darkness, the intruder lunged toward her from the right, then the left. He seemed to be everywhere!

In an instant, she found herself on the floor, free for a moment from the clutch of her attacker. *Run! Run!* she willed herself.

Mary stumbled down the stairs, screaming in a wild panic.

From the darkness upstairs, a voice rasped out, "*Mary!*"

Mary burst out the front door into the freezing air and tore down the street.

"Help! Somebody help me!" she screamed.

Mrs. Smith, an elderly woman who lived down the road, stood on her porch and called out to Mary, "Mary! What's wrong? What happened?"

Mary wailed, "Call 911! There's someone in my house!"

Mrs. Smith quickly ushered the terrified girl into her living room and bolted the door, then went into the kitchen and dialed the police. Mary peeked out from behind the sheer white curtains down the street at her dark house. She tried to catch her breath and flopped down on the worn green sofa. She didn't remember seeing anyone follow her outside, a fact that didn't make her feel any better.

*But who? Why?* she asked herself.

Mary nearly jumped out of her skin when Mrs. Smith walked back in the room carrying a plate of cookies. "Don't worry, honey," the woman assured her. "The police are on their way. You're safe here."

Mary waved away the plate of sweets. She felt too sick even to think about drinking a glass of water, let alone eat a cookie.

Mrs. Smith lifted the shade on the lamp to shine some more light on the girl. "My God! Your face and neck are all scratched and swollen!" she gasped.

Mary's eyes filled with tears. "He tried to kill me!" she moaned. "He... he... was in my house and my bedroom and he... he..."

Mrs. Smith put a gentle arm around Mary's shoulder. "Shhhhhh. Just relax. Shhhhhh."

Mary broke into a fit of uncontrollable sobbing.

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Moments later police sirens filled the air. A deputy officer entered Mrs. Smith's home to question Mary. The young police rookie filled out a report form as Mary described the attack in as much detail as she could remember. "It all happened so fast," she said. "And it was pitch black in there. I couldn't see his face."

Mary controlled her hysteria as she answered the questions. Then an ambulance pulled up outside. "I don't need an ambulance," she cried. "Really, I'm okay. Just a few scratches."

The rookie's radio crackled on. A scratchy voice reported, "We've got a suspect at the victim's home. He's unconscious. Can you bring the girl over to identify him?"

Mary's hands began shaking. "He's still in there?" she asked, feeling totally bewildered.

The rookie gave Mary a reassuring smile. "You must have given him quite a whack in the head," he commented.

Mary followed the deputy to her house, her eyes fixed on the bedroom window. Thin beams of light shone through the windows from the police flashlights inside. Blue and red police sirens pulsed across her lawn. "I can't believe this is happening to me!" she whispered.

The old police chief met Mary and the young deputy on her front lawn.

"Mary White?" he asked gruffly in her direction.

"Y-Yes," she stammered.

The chief pointed toward her house. "We need you to come inside with us to identify the suspect. He's still knocked out cold and the paramedics don't want to move him just yet. Can you do that for us?"

Mary went from feeling emotionless and empty to seethingly angry. Angry that someone would come into her own bedroom to attack her, to try and kill her. Yes, she decided. She would identify him, and make damn sure that he was put away for a long, long time. "Okay," she answered bravely.

Mary followed the two policemen through her front doors. Emergency light lanterns were set up all around the house now, so the darkness wasn't as black and suffocating as it had been.

The chief explained as they went up the stairs, "He cut the power. Totally ripped apart the box. We'll have the city fix it up later tonight after we've dusted for fingerprints."

Mary nodded dumbly. They reached the top of the stairs and the officers stepped aside as Mary peeked into her bedroom.

The blood drained from Mary's face when she saw who was lying on the floor.

"Oh no. It can't be!" she whispered. She backed out into the hallway and banged her head against the wall in disbelief.

The chief pointed through the doorway at the suspect, who was starting to come to. "You know this guy?" he asked.

Mary took a deep breath. "That's my ex-boyfriend, Jeff Wayland," she quavered, feeling as if she were stuck in a bad dream.

"We'll need you to make a positive ID, Miss White. Is this the man who attacked you?" the officer said routinely.

Mary's head was spinning.

*It couldn't be! This can't be happening.*

But the welts on her neck were real.

She peeked in at Jeff. He looked so peaceful, like a sleeping child with his golden hair curled around his ears. She turned away in disgust. "I-I don't know," she stammered. "It was too dark to see anything. I can't remember."

Jeff Wayland rolled his throbbing head against the carpet and blinked his eyes open as if he were just waking up on a lazy Sunday morning. Startled and confused, he tried to remember where he was and how he had gotten here. Suddenly he jumped to his feet, surprised by all the unfamiliar faces. He stumbled backward, still dizzy from a painful blow to his head.

The two officers rushed forward and grabbed the confused teen. The deputy pulled out a pair of handcuffs and snapped Jeff's hands together behind his back. "Whoa! Easy, son!"

In a flash it all came back to him. He frantically looked around the room, oblivious to the serious trouble he was in. "Mary!" he cried. "Where's Mary? Is she all right? Did you find him?"

The officer extracted his billy club just in case this teenage but got out of hand. "Take it easy, boy!" he bellowed. "You've got a lot of explaining to do!"

Jeff's eyes darted around the room, which had been turned upside down in the struggle, and he realized that he was being targeted as the attacker. "Oh no," he said, taking a step backward. "It's not what

you think. I was trying to save her from the guy who broke into the house," he explained calmly.

The officer laughed cynically, "Oh yeah? Well, where is he then? This... robber friend of yours."

Jeff looked down at the ripped sleeve of his sweatshirt. His explanation rushed out. "I saw someone come inside and I followed him... to make sure nothing bad happened to Mary. He must have hit me over the head and escaped." He pleaded, "You've got to believe me, officer. I'd never hurt Mary. Never."

Mary clamped her hands over her ears. She'd heard enough of this insanity! She began to sob and was led downstairs by a female paramedic.

The officer poked his billy club at Jeff. "Save it for later. You're coming down to the station with us."

Mary's parents pulled up in front of the house. They jumped out of the car, still dressed in their business suits. Mary's mom dropped her briefcase on the lawn and rushed over to the ambulance. "My God, honey! What on earth happened?" she cried.

Mary began crying and gave her mother a tight hug. "Someone—Jeff Wayland, I think—broke into the house and attacked me," she blubbered.

Mary's mom sucked in her breath. Mr. White rushed to the back door of the ambulance, where a paramedic was rubbing some disinfectant on Mary's scratches. Her father ran a shaky hand through his graying hair. "Are you okay, honey?" he asked softly.

"I'm fine, Daddy. I'm pretty shaken up, but I'm not really injured or anything," Mary answered, knowing she'd have to be strong to get through this.

Her father pushed his glasses up from his nose and sighed heavily. "I'm so sorry, honey." He clasped her hand in his. "I'm so sorry this happened to you."

The police officers led Jeff Wayland out of the house. His head was lowered in shame until he caught a glimpse of Mary sitting in the back of the ambulance. He tried to lunge toward her, but was violently jerked back by his captors. In a cracking voice, Jeff said, "Mary! I didn't do it! You gotta believe me! I was trying to save you!"

Mary shrank back in fear. *He's crazy. Completely and totally crazy. And he just tried to hurt me.* The horrible thought made her feel queasy.

The officers pushed Jeff into the back of the squad car and drove away into the night.



# CHAPTER

## 7

Mary shifted around on the couch in her dad's home office, trying to get her body into a comfortable position. Her room was too trashed to sleep in tonight. Besides, she really didn't want to go back in there right now, after what had happened. Her father's desktop looked like some sort of bizarre shrine, with ten or so flickering candles placed around the blank computer. The city couldn't restore the shredded power lines until tomorrow.

Mary's mother entered the room, carrying a steaming mug of hot chocolate with a giant mound of whipped cream on top. "Here you go, honey," she said, handing it to her daughter. "Are you sure you want to go to school tomorrow? It might be a good idea for you to stay home and rest," she suggested.

Mary sat and took a sip from the mug. "No, Mom," she said quickly. "I need to be around people."

Mrs. White smiled, but the concerned look remained in her eyes. "Okay," she said with a sigh. "I'll have the cleaning crew come tomorrow morning and straighten up your room." She laughed. "I bet you never thought you'd hear me say that, huh?"

Mary managed to laugh at her mom's attempt at humor, but the sound came out more like a dry cough. Her neck and throat were still sore. "Yeah." Mary's thoughts drifted back to the horrible attack. She really needed to talk right now. She scooted over beneath the patchwork quilt to make room for her mom to sit down.

Mary stared blankly at her father's computer, which gleamed eerily on the desk. "I can't understand it. I just don't see how Jeff could have done this to me...." Her voice trailed off.

Mrs. White squeezed Mary's hand. "I don't understand it either. He seemed like such a nice young man when you were seeing him last summer. But you never really can tell what a person is like inside. Look at Jeffrey Dahmer. Everyone thought he was a nice boy-next-door, until they found human heads in his refrigerator. Did Jeff ever act strange like this before?"

Mary shook her head. "No. Never," she said, then suddenly remembered his bizarre behavior at school. "Well, not until yesterday. He'd heard that I was going out with Josh Pinder and he came up to me at school and tried to warn me."

Mrs. White's eyebrows arched up. "Warn you?" she asked.

Mary cringed. "He said that Josh was dangerous." The last word stuck in her mind. *Dangerous*.

Mrs. White could see that Mary was starting to get upset again. She forced herself to smile and asked, "So how was your date with Josh? Did you have a good time?"

A loud yawn escaped Mary's mouth. "Yeah," she said sleepily. "We had a really good date. We went on his boat."

"His boat? Wow," Mrs. White said, obviously impressed. "Did he... do anything strange?"

"No, Mom," she answered. "He was pretty much a perfect gentleman. It looks like the only dangerous person in this town is Jeff Wayland. He must have gotten jealous and snapped," she said with a hint of sadness in her voice.

"Don't worry about it, honey," Mrs. White reassured her. "Jeff is in police custody now. You're safe."

"Yeah. I know," Mary said. Yet something was still bothering her. She spoke her thoughts aloud. "But I keep thinking about what he said. About someone else being in the house—"

Mrs. White cut her off. "Of course he would say some thing like that! For Pete's sake! The kid was found knocked out cold on your bedroom floor with a concussion, surrounded by the entire police department!"

Mary closed her heavy eyelids. "I know. But I don't remember hitting the intruder on the head. That's the weird part."

Mrs. White rose and tucked the quilt around Mary's shoulders. She explained, "Sometimes in a traumatic situation you do things that you don't remember." She planted a kiss on her daughter's cheek. "Get some rest, sweetie."

"Okay, Mom," Mary said. "Thanks for listening."

Mrs. White smiled and blew out the candles.

Mary lay on her side and stared into the darkness. But even though her body was exhausted, her mind refused to let her rest.

What if someone else *had* been in the house? What if Jeff had been telling the truth? she wondered.

*But who else could it have been?*

Mary was startled by a sudden noise.

The old house let out a groan as it creaked uneasily on its foundation. A horrible thought invaded Mary's mind.

*Could it have been Michael Myers?*

Mary squeezed her eyes shut, trying to turn off the fear that was sweeping through her.

Mary yawned again and tried to think of happier times, but her mind betrayed her. As she approached the edge of sleep, her thoughts flashed back to late August, last summer.

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She'd just picked up Jeff at his house, a run-down, two bedroom dwelling on the edge of the cemetery.

Mary had a picnic lunch packed up in the backseat of her convertible, which they planned to eat at the lake. They drove toward town with the top down, allowing the hot wind to blow wildly through their hair. It was just a couple of weeks before school started and Mary hadn't made any friends besides Jeff. The two of them had practically spent all of their free time together when Jeff wasn't working with his dad.

Jeff was a really great guy. They had so much fun together. He never had any money to take her anywhere, but she didn't care. Jeff took her on long hikes through the woods and for swims in the lake.

They'd only been seeing each other for three weeks, but Mary was starting to develop some strong feelings for him. He always looked so good in his old T-shirt and shorts. So natural. And he was a great kisser.

On Main Street, Mary had pulled into a parking space in front of the liquor store to buy a couple of cold sodas. "Be right back," she called to Jeff who smiled from the passenger seat of her car.

Mary went straight for the cooler and grabbed a six-pack. When she turned around to take the purchase to the counter, she'd suddenly collided into a severely handsome teenage boy. Her sodas scattered from the plastic binder all over the floor.

"Oh! I'm so sorry!" Mary apologized to him.

He smiled coolly, checking her out from head to toe. "No problem, cutie."

Mary blushed and stepped around him. He extended his hand toward her. "I'm Josh Pinder. Are you new around here?"

Mary shook his hand. "Yeah. I'm Mary White. Nice to meet you." She bent over to gather the drinks.

Josh handed her the last can. "Will you be going to Haddonfield High?" he asked.

"Yeah." She smiled. "Maybe I'll see you around."

Jeff Wayland entered the store and stopped dead in his tracks when he saw Josh talking to Mary. He overheard Josh ask her for her phone number and saw Mary giggle.

Josh sure is cute, Mary thought, but I'm seeing Jeff and it wouldn't be right to give him my phone number. She politely excused herself. "I've got to go," she told him. But she didn't.

Jeff had gone back to the car and leaned against the door. He scowled jealously as he watched them talking through the store window. He hated Josh Pinder and his money and the kind of person he was.

Mary had exited the store with a silly grin on her face. "I just met the nicest guy in there," she commented. "How come you're standing outside the car?" she asked.

Jeff just glared at her. "Why do you think?" he asked.

Mary threw the bag in the back of the car. "*I don't know*," she said sarcastically. "Are you ready to go?"

Jeff was silent.

Mary looked across the street at a thrift shop she hadn't noticed before. "Oh! Look!" she'd exclaimed. "Let's go in. I just love digging through all the old junk in those places."

Jeff's expression was still serious. "No," he insisted. "Let's just go."

"Lighten up," she teased. "I want to go inside. Come on. Let's blow a little cash."

"Is this some kind of a joke, Mary?" he asked. "Look, I don't need your charity," he said, his voice mocking.

Mary had totally lost this conversation somewhere. "Charity? What are you talking about?" she asked.

Jeff clenched the edge of his T-shirt and angrily shook it at her. "You think I have to buy my clothes here? Well, I don't!" he declared. He looked away from her and said with a sneer, "It's just like a rich, spoiled chick to assume that I'd have to do my school shopping here!"

"School shopping?" she said, trying to analyze this bizarre blowup. Mary suddenly realized that Jeff probably *did* shop here, not because he was into thrift shopping but because he was so poor. His pride had been damaged, big time.

"Oh, Jeff," she said compassionately. "I wasn't thinking anything. My buds and I back in L.A. always hit the thrifts," she explained. "I just thought it would be fun to—"

Jeff banged his fist against the door of her car. "Look, it's been nice, but I don't think we should hang out anymore!" he yelled. He looked at her with disgust. "You're too rich for my blood. You'll see what I mean when school starts. It's all about rich and poor. It will never work out between us."

"Too rich?" Mary snorted. "What are you talking about? I'm not rich! I'm middle-class, you dork!"

Jeff laughed sarcastically. "Middle-class," he spat back, grabbing her arm. "It figures you'd say something like that. Maybe *Josh Pinder* would be a better match for you! I saw the way you were flirting with *Mr. Moneybags*!"

Mary was infuriated by his stupid, adolescent behavior and tore herself away from his strong grip. She hadn't been flirting with anyone!

*If you wanted to dump me, at least you could have concocted a better reason,* she thought angrily.

"You're a real jerk, you know that?" She hurled a sandwich from the picnic basket at him and screamed, "Here's a sandwich for you,

*poor boy!"* She burst into tears and tore off down the street in her car.

That was the last time she'd spoken to Jeff Wayland, except for the other day at school. Sure, Jeff was a little weird—but weird enough to try and kill her?

His warning repeated over and over in her mind. "*Stay away from Josh... he's dangerous.*"

Could Josh have parked his car somewhere after their date and come inside the house? she wondered.

No, no way, she decided. He might be a hormone-crazed teenager, but he wasn't the attacker type.

On the other hand, neither was Jeff.

Mary didn't know what to think.

## CHAPTER 8

The next day at school was a rough one. Mary had spent most of the morning dodging her friends and questions about her date with Josh. Luckily, no one had heard about the attack, and since Mary wore a turtleneck sweater, the bruises and scratches on her neck were not visible. Mary figured that being at school was a lot safer than being cooped up in that house all by herself.

Thank God she hadn't seen Jeff Wayland anywhere today. She could only hope that the police were still holding him or that he had been released and was too ashamed to show his face at school.

After school, Josh spotted Mary hurrying off toward the student parking lot.

He chased after her and finally caught her up with her. "Where have you been all day?" he shouted. "I've been looking for you everywhere!"

"Hi, Josh." Mary casually waved. She really didn't feel like talking to him right now, or to anyone else, for that matter. She just wanted to get away.

Maybe I'll drive downtown and go shopping for my Halloween costume, she thought.

Josh tagged along behind her. "Is everything okay, Mary? Are you mad at me or something? I mean, I thought we had a *serious* chemistry thing going on last night? Am I right?"

Mary couldn't help but smile at him. He was acting like a little puppy dog. "Of course I'm not mad at you. I just had a bad night, that's all."

Josh looked really disappointed. "You did?" he asked glumly.

Mary corrected herself. "Oh no, not with you. I mean something bad happened *later* last night." She caught herself before she said anything more. She wasn't sure if she knew Josh well enough to pour her heart out.

"What?" he asked. "What happened?"

Mary stiffened a little. "Nothing. I'm okay."

"What do you mean you're *okay*?" he asked. "You're talking as if you had an accident or something. Now you've got me curious."

Mary searched his concerned face. "I just...never mind."

Josh put his hands on Mary's shoulders and looked her straight in the eye. "Open up a little, Mary. It might help to talk about it."

Here goes nothing, Mary thought. She lowered her eyes. "I was attacked last night."

"What?" Josh yelled. "Last night? When? Who did it?"

Mary calmly explained, "After you left. Someone broke into the house and attacked me." She paused for a moment and sucked in her breath. "The police found Jeff Wayland on my floor."

"Jeff Wayland!" Josh exclaimed. He caught himself before he said too much. "Jeff Wayland, Jeff Wayland..." he mumbled, as if trying to remember who he was. "Oh yeah, that creepy *loser* guy who lives by the *cemetery*?" he asked cynically.

"Do you know him?" Mary asked

"No," Josh snapped quickly. "He attacked you? That scum-sucking creep. Are you okay?"

Mary nodded her head and looked blankly at the ground beneath her feet.

The concern in Jeff's eyes turned to fierce anger and he pounded his fist in the palm of his hand. "I'm gonna kick his sorry ass all the way back to the graveyard!" he growled viciously.

"No, no," Mary said, waving the idea off. "I think the police still have him, and we're not sure that... he was the one who did it."

Josh's face became puzzled. "But you just said..."

Mary explained, "Jeff says he didn't do it. He said someone else was in the house and he came in to save me." As the words came out of her mouth, Mary suddenly realized how stupid she sounded.

*Why am I trying to protect Jeff?* she wondered.

Josh rolled his eyes. "What was he doing at your house in the first place then?" he asked in a sinister tone.

Mary didn't have an answer. "I don't know. But the police will handle him," she said, her voice doubtful.

"You sure?" he asked. "I mean, are you sure you're okay?"



Mary smiled. Josh really seemed to care. "Yeah. I'm pretty freaked out, but I'm okay."

Josh hooked his arm around her shoulder. "Let's go out tonight and forget about that loser," he suggested. "Let's get the whole gang together and go party somewhere." He gave her a wink. "Sounds like you could use a little *group therapy*."

"I don't know," Mary said. "I don't think it would be good idea."

"Come on. It's Friday night," he reminded her. "Besides, I want to spend more time with you."

The dreamy look in Josh's soft blue eyes was almost irresistible. "I'll think about it," she said.

He gave her a little peck on the cheek. "I'll call you later and we'll figure out where we're going to go." He smiled.

Mary smiled back and opened the door of her car. "Okay." She laughed, amused by the way he wouldn't take no for an answer.

Mary carefully maneuvered her car out of the student parking lot to avoid hitting herds of kids and sophomore drivers who had just gotten their licenses.

She drove her red convertible down Main Street and pulled into a parking space a few doors away from Johnson's Department Store.

She sighed, looking through her windshield at the old-fashioned general store. Johnson's was the closest thing to a shopping mall in Haddonfield. It sold everything from stationery to cough medicine to cheap sneakers.

The Halloween costume display in the window caught her eye. She figured that she might get a few ideas for what to dress up as tomorrow night if she went in and browsed around. After all, she had some time to kill, and she certainly didn't want to go home to that empty house. She couldn't wait for the mega-shopping mall to open next month.

Mary pushed open the door of the store, and a little bell tinkled against the glass. She sifted through the rack of cheap costumes and mumbled, "French maids, witches, vampires, a gypsy. A gypsy!"

Yeah, that's perfect, she thought, since I've just migrated across the country.

She crinkled her nose at the cheap nylon costume and decided she'd be better off putting together her own gypsy getup at home. She had a red broom skirt and tons of costume jewelry that she could use. All she needed was a pair of gaudy gold earrings.

Mary selected a pair of dangling coin earrings from the jewelry rack and a pair of glittery panty hose. Happy with her finds, she went over to the cosmetics counter and picked out a bottle of gleaming gold nail polish. She also bought some violet eye shadow and a stick of black eyeliner to create the mysterious, smoky-eyed look of a gypsy girl.

She was feeling better as she carried her plastic bag out of the store. At least she'd decided what to be for the party tomorrow night.

Mary stood on the sidewalk, digging through her purse for her car keys.

She heard someone whisper her name.

She turned around and gasped as panic welled up inside her.

Jeff Wayland stepped out of the alley alongside the store. In shock, Mary dropped her bag, and her purchases scattered all over the sidewalk.

Jeff took a step backward, realizing he'd scared her. "I-I'm sorry, Mary," he stammered. He bent down to try and help her recover her things.

Mary's hands were shaking so badly she couldn't seem to grasp the bottle of nail polish that had rolled into the gutter. "Leave me alone!" she shouted. "Go away or I'll call the police!" she warned.

Jeff stood up and raised his hands. He stood there defenseless, his palms spread. He really hoped she didn't start screaming. He *had* to talk to her. "Okay. Okay. I'm not gonna hurt you. I know this looks crazy, but I've got to tell you what happened last night."

Mary's eyes darted from left to right and back again. There were plenty of people around. He wouldn't dare try to strangle her right here on the street, she told herself. But she still had to get away from him fast.

She grabbed the eye shadow, which had landed next to his heavy work boot. "Just go away and stop following me!" Jeff lowered his voice.

"The police let me go late last night. There was no evidence. In fact, whoever broke in didn't leave any fingerprints."

This kept her quiet long enough for him to continue. "I saw someone come out of the woods and go around the back of your house. When I saw all the lights go off, I freaked out."

"What were you doing at my house anyway!" she demanded.

Jeff's face became red with embarrassment. "I was worried that Josh might try to get you to do something you didn't want to do. I was just trying to protect you."

Mary was furious. "Since when do I need you as my bodyguard?" she spat.

"Since you started going out with Josh," he blurted out. Jeff pleaded, "I was just trying to help. You don't know about Josh like I do."

Mary snapped, "Well, as far as I know, Josh barely even knows who you are, except that you're a loser who lives by the cemetery!"

Jeff controlled his anger, "Yeah. Maybe so," he growled. "Next time you see your buddy Josh, why don't you ask him *how* he knows that I live in the house next to the cemetery. Ask him what *happened* there last New Year's Eve. *Ask him about the girl.*"

Mary flinched. "What are you trying to tell me?" she said coldly. She couldn't believe she was actually standing here, having a conversation with Jeff Wayland.

Anger flashed in Jeff's eyes. "Nothing. Just ask him. You'll see."

Mary cringed back, trying to inch toward her car. Jeff seemed so forceful, so dangerously hostile. Something weird was going on here, and she didn't know what it was. Jeff took a deep breath. "Mary, let's forget about Josh for a minute. I have something far more important to tell you."

"Well, I don't want to hear it!" She turned away to open her car door.

Jeff continued talking to the back of her head. "Late last night, after my dad picked me up from the police station, I saw something weird out in the cemetery."

Mary stood frozen, wondering where this story was leading.

Jeff lowered his voice to a whisper. "There was a light out there. So I followed it and I found a..." He stopped, as if he could barely bring himself to say it. "I found a lit up jack-o'-lantern on Judith Myers's grave." He placed his hand on Mary's shoulders, which made her tremble. His voice quivered. "I think Michael Myers is back. I think he was in your house last night."

Mary was paralyzed.

*Was he lying? Was he making this crazy story up to cover himself? To make her believe that he was on her side and that she was in grave danger?*

She shook his hands off her shoulder and whipped around to face him. "You're crazy, Jeff Wayland! You're a freaking head case! Stay away from me!" she screamed.

Mary jumped in her car and sped off down the road.

# CHAPTER

## 9

A couple of hours after the Jeff Wayland incident, Mary finally pulled into her driveway. She'd driven up to the lake and parked for a while, hoping that the fresh air would help clear her head; her mind was so full of confused, tumbling thoughts. But it hadn't helped. Just thinking about it all had only made the confusion worse. The one thing she was sure of though was that Jeff Wayland had really snapped, and she was very afraid that he'd come back to the house again.

The house looked peaceful, as if nothing had ever happened there.

She unlocked the door and very carefully looked around to make sure no one was inside. Then she checked the new dead bolt on the back door just to make herself feel better.

Mary's stomach growled. It was almost dark, and she realized that she hadn't eaten lunch today.

She grabbed a bagel from the bread box and reached for a knife from the wooden block on the counter.

Mary realized that something was wrong and dropped the bagel. The bread rolled across the floor.

*All of the butcher knives were missing.*

She stepped backward away from the counter, staring at the empty block. Had the intruder taken the knives? Had he meant to—

Suddenly the phone on the kitchen wall blared loudly, making her jump.

*Get a grip*, she told herself.

"Hello?" she answered warily.

Her parents' car pulled up in front of the house.

Mary picked the bagel off the floor. "Hi, Josh," she said into the receiver. "No, I'm fine."

Mary's mom walked through the kitchen and waved hello. "Hang on a minute," Mary whispered to Josh.

Mary turned to her mom. "The knives are missing," she told her mom.

"Well, I certainly hope so. I took them in to get sharpened this morning," Mrs. White said.

With a sigh of relief, Mary picked up the receiver again. "Hi, Josh. My parents just came home from work. They're building the mega-mall on the outside of town."

She smiled as Josh in his velvety-smooth voice, asked her to go out with him tonight. He'd already called Shannon, Kimmy, and Tanya, and they were coming.

She certainly didn't want to stick around her house and wait for Jeff Wayland to pay her another visit.

"Okay," she agreed. "I'll meet you guys at Rose's Diner in thirty minutes. Bye."

\*\*\*

Mary hung up the phone and went up to her room to change. The cleaning service had done a great job, she thought. Everything had been put back in place.

She dumped the plastic bag of costume accessories from Johnson's on her dresser and slipped into a pair of black sweats and a matching hooded sweatshirt. She zipped up the sweatshirt over a pink tank top and wove her auburn hair into a loose braid. Then she applied a dab of sheer gloss to her lips and bounded down the stairs.

"I'll be home by ten; I'm going to the diner," she called to her mom, who was looking for something in the freezer.

"Okay, Mary. We'll see you later," Mrs. White answered.

\*\*\*

Josh was waiting in the parking lot of Rose's Diner. He was leaning up against the side of his Porsche under the bright moonlight, looking heartbreakingly handsome as usual. Mary shivered as she stepped out of her car, and wished she'd worn something a little warmer.

"Where is everyone?" she asked, not seeing any of her friends in the parking lot.

Josh smiled. "Don't I even get a hello?"

Mary leaned against his car next to him. "Hello," she said.

Josh wiped his hand across the glossy paint on his car as if he were polishing it. "They're coming," he said. "I think Shannon and Kimmy went to pick up Tanya and her friend."

Just then, Shannon pulled up in her car. They were all laughing and carrying on inside.

Shannon rolled down her window. "So what are we going to do?" she asked.

Josh whispered, "I've got some brewskis in the trunk."

Mary recognized Tanya's date, Rob Wheeler, scrunched in the backseat. He was a good-looking guy with dark hair and unusually long legs. Mary guessed that was why he was the school's star basketball player.

Shannon cackled, "Josh has got brewskis!" They all laughed.

Mary suggested, "Why don't we go to your boat?"

"Great idea," Kimmy agreed. "I could go for a little late-night cruise!"

Josh sighed. "No can do. My sister's there with her boyfriend."

Mary was getting really cold. Josh must have picked up on it, because he suddenly wrapped his arms around her. "Let's go check out the mall. Mary's parents are the builders," Josh said. "What do you say, Mary?" he asked.

"I don't know," Mary protested. "There's really nothing to do there. I mean, it won't be open until Thanksgiving."

"Exactly!" Josh said. "No one will be *there* until Thanksgiving either! It's the perfect place to kick back."

"You mean go inside?" Mary asked.

Tanya poked her head out the back window. "What, are you afraid your mommy might find out?" she challenged.

Everyone was staring at Mary, waiting for her to say okay. She didn't want to look like a wimp, and she guessed they couldn't really do any harm. She admitted, "Well, I do know this back way to get inside. I don't think they've set up the alarm system yet."

Shannon hooted, "Cool! Let's go!"

It was too late to back out now, Mary thought.

She instantly regretted her decision. Why are you being so irresponsible? she thought.

Before she knew it, Mary was leading the caravan to the mall.

It was pitch black outside except for a few streetlights that shone across the empty, massive parking lot. Mary pulled her car around the back of one of the department stores and stood by the chain-link fence. The temporary security booth was dark and empty.

Josh lugged the six-pack of beer out of his trunk.

Mary tried to remember how to get in. Her parents had showed her the back way just a few weeks ago.

"This is creepy," Kimmy said, slamming the passenger door of Shannon's BMW. "It's like something out of a horror movie." She lowered her voice and croaked, "*The mall with no shoppers.*"

Shannon shook at the fence. "Let us in! Let us in!" she said, laughing.

"Shhhhhhhh!" Mary hissed. "I think there's a security guard around here somewhere." She peered around the dark parking lot. "Let's just leave, you guys. I don't remember how to get inside."

Rob Wheeler stretched his slender arm between two fences and effortlessly freed the latch. The gate cracked open. "Party time," he said casually, stepping inside.

They all slid in after him.

Mary knew she wasn't going to be able to relax here; she'd have to spend her time keeping an eye on her wild friends. She slipped through the fence and chased behind the others, trying to keep them quiet. "Over here, you guys!" she whispered.

Mary stood before a black box on the wall and struggled to remember the lock combination. Carefully, she punched in the entry code. A series of beeps went off, and then a click. She pulled open the heavy, metal delivery door. Her heart was pounding, and she froze for a moment, silently praying that a blaring alarm wouldn't sound. All was quiet. And she decided that if they did get caught she could say that she was just looking for her parents or something. After all, they were here late almost every night.

Mary ushered her friends through the doors of the cavernous receiving dock for the mall's main department store.



Mary motioned for everyone to be quiet as she led the giggling group through the dimly lit store. Cardboard boxes lined the empty walls and disassembled shelves and counters waiting to be put up created a dangerous walking zone.

Tanya stopped to peek inside a sealed carton. Mary looked back and hissed, "Don't touch anything! Come on."

Tanya gave the box a shove and glared back angrily "Don't be so *serious*, Mary. I was just curious."

Josh cracked open a beer and whispered, "Yeah? Well, curiosity killed the cat. Didn't your mother teach you that?"

Tanya narrowed her eyes and smirked at Josh, then purred, "Meow." She grabbed Rob by the hand. "Aren't you going to share, Josh," she asked, pointing at his beer.

Josh snapped the beers out of the plastic binder ring and passed them around. Mary stopped and looked up at the steel security gate that stood between the department store and the rest of the mall.

Shannon peered out into the huge corridor and whistled. "Whoa. Check it out. There's a giant oak tree in the middle of the mall!"

Mary smiled, feeling a sense of pride in her parents' work. "That's going to be the play area for kids. That tree is a miniature version of the one in the Mall of America, and it has three levels." She pointed up at the moon, which shone down through the glass dome above the giant tree. You can see the sky through there."

Kimmy peered through the steel bars to take a look. "Wow! Can we go check it out?"

"I don't know," Mary said nervously. "I don't think we should go out there. There might be a guard buzzing around."

"Oh come on, Mary. We haven't seen anyone at all," Kimmy said. With a mischievous grin on her face, she pushed the rolling gate open a few inches. "It's not even locked" she whined.

Shannon took a gulp of her beer and slid the gate open a little farther. "You're right, Kimmy. It's not locked." She looked at Mary as if asking her permission to go through.

Mary rolled her eyes. "Okay. *But don't touch anything*," she warned.

The teenagers slid through the gate and took off running toward the monstrous tree house.

Mary threw her hands up in the air. Were they totally insane? she wondered. "And be careful," Mary whispered sharply. "There's—"

Kimmy suddenly tripped over a beam on the floor. She shrieked as her beer flew out of her hand, and she landed hard on her rear end.

Mary finished her sentence, mumbling to herself, "There's stuff on the floor." Then she chased after Kimmy and helped her up.

Tanya was laughing hysterically. "Good thing you've got a little padding down there!"

Kimmy glared at Tanya as she pulled her sweater over her hips. "Thanks a lot," she said.

"Come on," Mary said, pulling her by the hand.

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The dark figure moved silently past the fancy sports cars in the parking lot, lit only by the gleaming moon. He'd watched the giggling teenagers enter the mall, watched them sneak through the gates. They were inside now. And he was going to trap them there.

He swiftly traced their steps and vanished into the blackness of the huge structure.

\*\*\*

Shannon was the first to enter the child-sized doorway that was carved through the massive trunk of the tree. The other kids followed behind her and up the winding staircase to the upper levels of the giant tree house. A small lookout platform, nestled amongst the fiberglass branches, allowed a bird's-eye view of the entire mall below. They settled on the floor, panting heavily from the three-flight climb.

Mary peered out over the rail and motioned for everyone to be quiet to make sure that no one, particularly a security guard, was aware of their presence. She saw no one and sat down to relax for a few minutes.

Kimmy looked around. "Wow. It is so pretty up here. I can't wait till the mall opens."

Mary smiled. "Yeah. This place is going to be totally cool. We're actually going to have some *real* stores around here. The shopping in this town is mega-lame."

"You can say that again!" Shannon agreed. "I have to drive nearly forty miles to buy my clothing."

Josh pointed up at the dome directly overhead and shouted, "Look! Up there in the sky!"

They all tilted their heads upward to look at the starry sky.

Josh cackled, "I can see Uranus!"

The group burst into laughter.

Shannon crumpled her beer can. "You are so gross, Josh!" she laughed.

"Yeah?" he joked. "You just wish you'd said it before I did!"

Mary hugged her knees, enjoying sitting so close to Josh. She looked at her friends through the dim light and smiled. After all was said and done, she was really glad that her family had moved to Haddonfield. "Hey. Where's Tanya and Rob?" she asked, not seeing them within view.

Josh whispered, "They took off a few minutes ago. They probably want a little privacy, if you know what I mean."

Mary knew what he meant all right, but didn't like the idea of her friends straying off by themselves on this little late-night tour. "Tanya? Rob?" she called.

No one answered.

"Forget about them," Kimmy said. "I'm sure they'll be back in about *fifteen minutes*."

Shannon giggled at Kimmy's snide insult. "Yeah. Really."

"Fifteen minutes?" Josh mocked. "Is that all you girls ever get?"

A deep red blush flushed Kimmy's face. "Shut up, Josh."

Mary felt uneasy. She didn't trust Tanya, and was afraid she'd try to steal something.

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Tanya giggled as Rob led her back through the security gates of the department store. "I don't think we should fool around in here," she whispered a little uneasily.

Rob squeezed her hand tightly and felt a tingle through his hormone-ravaged body. "Trust me," he said breathlessly.

Tanya finished her beer and threw the can, which clanked across the cement floor. Rob retraced their steps to the delivery room and pushed open a heavy door. "No one will find us in here," he whispered.

Tanya's hair stood on end as her eyes adjusted to the darkness.

Hundreds of naked mannequins stared at them with glassy, cold eyes.

"This is too weird. I feel like they're watching us," she said. "Let's go back and find the others," she suggested.

Rob pulled her close with his strong arms and planted a spine-tingling kiss on her lips.

Tanya felt weak and dizzy. She closed her eyes and pretended that it was Josh who was holding her tightly and kissing her, giving her the male attention she so desperately craved. "Okay," she said.

She kissed him back and allowed Rob to press his body tightly against hers. He groaned with pleasure as she ran her fingers through his hair.

Rob ripped off his letterman's jacket and dropped it on the floor. Tanya let him slide his hand under her black cashmere sweater as he kissed her neck.

Then she suddenly opened her eyes and wondered if she was making a mistake.

Will going all the way with Rob really cause Josh to be jealous? she wondered. Had Josh even noticed when we left a few minutes ago?

A dark shape suddenly and unmistakably moved among the mannequins in the back of the room. Tanya felt a spike of fear travel down her spine as she pushed Rob's face away and whispered, "Let's go! There's someone in here!"

Rob lazily glanced over his shoulder and kissed her again. "Just relax, baby. There's no one here but you and me."

Tanya struggled out of his grasp. "I really saw something!" she pleaded. "It was right over—"

Tanya shrieked and Rob jumped back as a pile of naked wooden bodies suddenly tumbled on top of her.

Tanya's heart thudded with terror as the sound of her screaming filled the air. Her body numb with fright, she scrambled to dig her way out of the pile of arms, legs, and heads. A pair of wooden fingers were gnarled around a lock of her curly blond hair. "Help me!" she screamed.

Rob stumbled up from the floor and glanced into the darkness. Was someone else in the room with them? No, he decided; they must have brushed against the pile and ked the bodies over.

He laughed at the ridiculous scene and imagined himself boasting to his buddies about this one over lunch tomorrow. Tanya was still screaming like a lunatic, so he began pushing the mannequins aside. It was so hard to see anything in the dark. He grabbed Tanya's hand and had started to pull her out when his legs were suddenly knocked out from beneath him.

"What the—" he shouted as he tumbled to the ground, smacking his skull against the concrete floor.

Rob was shaking his head and trying to push himself up from the floor when he saw it. He tried to scream, but no sound came out of his dry throat.

*This can't be real!*

A hulking figure emerged through the rows of mannequins. The gleam of the razor-sharp butcher knife clutched in his hand promised death as he stepped closer and closer.

Just as Tanya freed her hair from the grasp of the cold mannequin hand, she looked up and screamed as the blade of the knife plunged into Rob's chest, crunching through his ribs and tearing apart his lungs. Rob reached out a desperate hand. With savage swiftness, the dark figure grabbed his arm, twisting it savagely out of its socket with a flesh-ripping pop.

*Oh no! Oh God no! please let this be some kind of a sick joke....*

She opened her eyes and uttered a silent gasp of terror as she saw the horrifying, dying body of her date that lay crumpled at her feet.

*This is real. This is really happening!*

Rob's guttural screams stopped and his mouth hung open like that of a dead fish. Bright red blood gushed from his mouth and nose.

The face of the murderer was hidden in the shadows. He stepped forward, raising the bloodied knife.

Using all her strength, Tanya winced and kicked the pile of bodies toward the attacker, which only made him stagger slightly. The figure recoiled and lunged at her with the knife.

Tanya's last, desperate scream was cut short when the blade rammed into her throat. As the shadowed figure savagely ripped the knife out again, she clasped her hands over the gaping wound and felt the warm, sticky liquid pulsing out of her body. She tried to scream again, but could only manage a bubbling gurgle. Tanya sank to her knees and looked into the cold, dead eyes of her murderer, whose scar-puckered face was hidden behind a hideous white mask. She knew who had done this, but would not live to tell about it. Her heavy eyelids closed and everything faded to white.

\*\*\*

Mary was rolling on the floor of the platform laughing as Josh sang an out-of-key version of "Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall."

Josh sang out, "Seventy bottles of beer..."

"Shut up! You're driving me crazy!" Mary howled, grabbing her aching sides.

Josh finally stopped singing and put his arm around her. "You win. What would you like to hear next? 'Feelings'?"

Shannon laughed and said, "Speaking of *feelings*, it's been *twenty* minutes since our buddies left. Maybe I should find myself a basketball player."

"Maybe you should find yourself a cold shower!" Kimmy joked.

Mary stood up to stretch her legs and looked down at the ground level of the mall. "At the very least, it was *so totally rude* of them to just take off like this. Where would they have gone?"

"Who knows. They could be anywhere. This is a big place," Josh responded, unconcerned.

*Squealch!!!!*

"What was that!" Mary whispered, the loud sound making her body jerk.

"It came from up there!" Kimmy said, pointing upward.

She was staring at the skydome.

Suddenly, something swift and dark flashed outside, across the top of the glass dome.

The teenagers squealed.

"Oh my God!" Mary yelled. "Let's get out of here! It must be security!"

"Or the SWAT team!" Shannon choked out.

Mary, Josh, Kimmy, and Shannon scrambled down the staircase inside the tree trunk, ran across the mall toward the department store.

Fear pulsed through Mary's body as she ran behind her friends.

*What if we get caught! My parents will never trust me again!*

Shannon slammed into the security gate. "Someone locked it!" she screamed.

Josh grabbed the steel bars and tugged as hard as he could. The gate slid open. "It's not locked," he said, huffing. "Just closed."

"Who cares!" Kimmy whimpered, looking back at the skydome. "Let's get out of here!"

"What about Tanya and Rob?" Mary protested. "We can't just leave them in here!"

Josh pulled Mary by the hand. "They'll be okay," he declared. "We don't all need to get in trouble, do we?"

"I guess not." Mary gulped as her eyes searched the dark expanse of the mall one last time.

"Come on," Josh shouted, dragging her toward the loading dock.

Mary allowed herself to be guided through the maze of boxes and shelving on the floor, worried about Tanya and Rob, and angry at them at the same time.

*Those stupid jerks. They deserve whatever they get,* she thought.

Once outside, Mary breathed in the cold night air. She hesitated, looking at the security lock. "I'm going to leave it open for them," she said.

"Whatever," Shannon panted. "See you guys later," she called as she and Kimmy disappeared through the chain-link fence and jumped into her car.

Josh's body was pumping with adrenaline. The whole thing had been such a *rush*. He stopped Mary and pushed her shoulders back against the fence.

Bewilderment and surprise filled her widened eyes. "W-What are you doing? We've got to get out of here!" she stammered.

Josh pressed his lips against hers. "You really turn me on, Mary. That was a radical experience," he whispered breathlessly.

Mary got lost in his kiss for a moment and nearly forgot that someone had been watching them.

But she opened her eyes and jumped when she heard the noise above them.

*Clunk!!!!*

The noise had come from somewhere on the roof.

Mary uttered a gasp of panic. "Let's go!" she pleaded, her heart racing as quickly as Josh's, but for entirely different reasons.

Josh gave Mary another kiss as she grabbed his hand. "Hurry up!" she hissed.

\*\*\*

Josh hopped in his car and started the engine. Mary jumped in her car, and the two teens sped away from the mall.

Mary tossed her hair back and sank into the driver's seat, feeling relieved. But she also felt wild and crazy, just like she used to.

She was light-headed from all the excitement... and Josh, wow! He was something else. She watched the taillights of his Porsche disappear down the road as he sped away in his pumped-up sports car.

"What a night!" she exclaimed.



# CHAPTER

## 10

Mary hung up the phone and stared blankly at her bedroom wall. She couldn't *believe* the news she'd just heard.

Shannon had just informed her that Tanya and Rob *never* came home last night. No one had seen them since the mall last night. Tanya's parents were calling around, frantically trying to locate their daughter.

Shannon had concocted a sort-of-true story saying that they'd all gone to the mall last night, and just fooled around in the parking lot. She'd told Tanya's parents that the couple had wandered away and no one could find them. She'd said that they'd tried to find them before they left....

Shannon made Mary swear to stick to that story if anyone, including the police, asked, and Mary agreed. That way, *if* Tanya and Rob *had* gone inside, the others had had nothing to do with it.

Mary didn't know whether to be angry or worried. Where could they possibly be?

Maybe they'd fallen asleep inside the mall and just hadn't come home yet.

*Maybe they were dead....*

Mary shook the chilling thought from her mind and cast her eyes downward when Mrs. White passed by her doorway. Mary's mom looked fresh and businesslike in her tailored navy suit. "Everything okay, honey?" she asked.

Mary faked a cheerful voice. "Yeah. Everything's fine," she lied, feeling guilty.

She felt like she couldn't tell her mom that they'd broken into the mall last night. She just wouldn't understand. Hopefully she just wouldn't find out.

Mrs. White smiled. "Good. Your father and I have to go to the mall for a while to finalize the concrete plans for Monday." She looked apologetically at her daughter. "We'll try not to get home too late."

Mary disguised her panic with a guilty smile. "Okay. I'll be at Josh Pinder's party," she said, wondering if her mom somehow knew about last night. What if security had taken down her license plate number? What if the police started searching the mall for Tanya and Rob?

"Have fun," Mrs. White said.

"Yeah." Mary frowned. "Okay."

\*\*\*

Mary fixed herself a bowl of vegetable soup as a late afternoon lunch. She seated herself at the pine kitchen table and slurped up a spoonful of the reddish liquid.

Thoughts of the other night's attack invaded her mind. She glanced at the back door again to make sure it was bolted. Through the tiny window she could see clouds forming in the darkening sky.

What if Jeff Wayland had been the one on the mall skydome? she asked herself.

*He's the only one crazy enough to follow me.*

Jeff's bizarre warning about Michael Myers entered her mind.

*No way. It couldn't have been Michael Myers... but what if?*

Jeff's desperate warning echoed through her mind, over and over again. When he'd told her about the cemetery yesterday, she hadn't believed him, thought he was just trying to cover up. But what if it was true? Why were Tanya and Rob still missing?

Mary suddenly had a chilling thought.

*What if Jeff had something to do with their disappearance?*

Mary forced herself to swallow the last spoonful of soup.

She went up to her room to get dressed for Josh's Halloween party. She had to get over there and find out if anyone had seen or heard anything about Tanya and Rob.

\*\*\*

Mary's gypsy costume lay neatly across her bed. She peeled off her jeans and sweater and carefully put on the new pair of shimmering gold panty hose. In front of the mirror, Mary dressed herself in her

clingy red broom skirt and a tight black halter top. The thin fabric of the skirt clung to her shapely legs and brushed just above her ankles as she twirled around, watching her colorful reflection. The festive costume did nothing to brighten her dampened spirits. The last thing she felt like doing tonight was attending a party and pretending to be happy when Tanya and Rob were missing. Maybe they'll be there, she told herself.

*Yes. Everything will be okay.*

Mary set her long hair in hot rollers. She swept some sparkling violet eye shadow on her lids and carefully outlined her eyes with a smoky-gray liner pencil.

\*\*\*

Outside Mary heard a chorus of little voices tinkling with laughter. She peered out her window and spotted a group of grade-school kids clustered on her front lawn. Mary smiled, remembering how little kids go trick-or-treating on Halloween. She wrapped a black scarf over the rollers on her head and went downstairs, where she picked up a bowl overflowing with miniature candy bars and opened the front door.

The children screamed when she poked her head outside. One little boy dressed up as a cowboy screamed out, "It's the Bogeyman's wife! Run for your lives!" He picked up an apple-sized rock and hurled it at the house. Mary watched in bewilderment as they took off running down the street.

The rock landed nowhere near the house, but it did come dangerously close to her new car. It made her wonder what kind of stories their parents had been telling them. Mary slammed the door and with a scowl muttered, "Little brats!"

She suddenly remembered the horrible tales of the Halloween massacres. How Michael Myers had butchered dozens of teenagers. How he'd once lived in her house.

How he always came *home* on Halloween...

Mary glanced at the clock and realized she was supposed to have been at the party fifteen minutes ago. She quickly unrolled the

curlers from her hair and tied her curly locks back with the black scarf.

She removed a bottle of her favorite perfume from the mirrored tray atop her vanity dresser. She sprayed a little of the fine, sweet mist on her neck and wrists and set it back on the tray. The beaded necklaces that she draped around her neck were a nice addition to the costume, as were the gold coin earrings that she clipped onto her earlobes. Mary looked approvingly at her reflection. She was about to leave when out of the corner of her eye she caught a glimpse of something. Something that hadn't been sitting on the dresser last night.

Mary picked up the worn, folded-up piece of paper and held it to the light. "Strange," she mumbled, her curiosity aroused.

It looked like some kind of note, but there was something inside, she determined by the weight.

She carefully unfolded the paper.

Mary gasped as her gold bracelet jingled to the floor. The same bracelet that had hopelessly fallen under the house a few days earlier. Its shiny gold luster was cut down to a dull gleam from the dried blood that was caked on it.

Someone had been down there!

*Oh my God!*

Mary's blood seemed to stop flowing. Her body felt frozen as she stared at the bracelet.

The sight of the bloody piece of jewelry sent waves of shock through her body.

*Whose blood is that!*

She quickly picked up the bracelet and with trembling fingers threw it disgustedly on top of the dresser.

*I should call the police,* she told herself. No, she decided; there's no time. *What if he's here right now!* Mary grabbed her purse and rushed out of the house.

# CHAPTER

## 11

Mary maneuvered her car through the dark forest roads on the way to Josh's neighbourhood, Haddonfield Estates. She passed the giant mansions and horse pastures that this posh area was famed for before she finally made a right onto the cul-de-sac where his impressive home was nestled. Josh's house was easy to spot by all the staggering teenagers milling around the gated, private driveway. The massive estate was built entirely of gray stones and looked more like something out of a history book than a house. A battalion of ancient, barren trees surrounded the home, which Mary estimated to be several hundred years old. Mary squeezed her car in between two cars on the street.

She walked up the steep driveway and waved hello to a few kids she recognized from school. A gawky teenage boy wearing a sweat-soaked T-shirt and a silly clown mask swung open the ornately carved door and chugged down the remainder of his beer from a plastic cup. Mary politely stepped around the intoxicated bozo and let herself into the grand parlor. A few couples sat on the antique couches making out in the dim candlelight.

The smoky living room reeked of beer and sweat. Loud rock music blared from the stereo system and there were hundreds of kids in the room. A giant keg spit out cups of beer, most of it spilling onto the expensive Oriental rug. A large group of kids danced in the center of the living room, the majority of them holding beers in their hands.

Mary whirled around, trying to locate her friends through the pulses of the flickering strobe light. It was going to be quite a task, she thought; nearly everyone was in costume.

She stood still, trying to make sense of the wild scene. So much for Josh's intimate little party, she thought. Nearly everyone from school was here, including the nerds, geeks, and every other social class. At the very least, she figured, he'd be in major trouble when his parents came home.

She silently prayed that Tanya and Rob were here so she could stop worrying.

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Shannon sneaked up on Mary and grabbed her shoulders from behind.

Mary gasped and then laughed when she saw Shannon's silly costume. Shannon was wearing a red satin jumpsuit from the seventies with a pair of chunky platform heels. She spun around in the skintight outfit. "I'm the dancing queen!" she shouted gaily. Mary could smell beer on her breath and wondered how she could possibly keep her balance on those ridiculous shoes.

Kimmy clunked over, wearing a leather biker-chick outfit and a pair of heavy boots. She pointed to her arm, where there was a fake tattoo of a skull and snake under a banner that read *Mother*. Kimmy looked at Mary and said, "You look pretty stressed out. Everything okay?"

Mary shouted over the music, "No. Everything's really weird. Have you guys seen Tanya and Rob yet?"

The goofy grin disappeared from Shannon's face. "No. We're really worried. Her parents filed a missing persons report."

"Maybe they just eloped or something," Kimmy offered.

Shannon rolled her eyes, which were painted in electric blue eye shadow. "Yeah! Right. They've only been dating for, what, two days? I think marriage is a little out of the question."

"*Well, excuuuuse me!*" Kimmy snapped. "I'm just trying to figure out what happened. Let's go to the kitchen. It's way loud out here."

The girls agreed and made their way to Josh's giant kitchen. Mary pushed a few empty pizza boxes off the white-tiled counter and sat down.

Kimmy stared at her under the bright fluorescent lights. "Oh my God, Mary! What happened to your neck?" she said, gawking at the purple bruises that formed a handprint.

Shannon stepped in to get a closer look. "Ooh! That is so gross!"

Mary had forgotten that her friends didn't know about the attack. She explained, "S-Someone broke into my house the other night. The guy pushed me around before I was able to escape."

"What!" Shannon cried. "*Some guy* attacked you? Who was it? Did they catch him?"

Mary hesitated for a moment as a couple of girls passed through the kitchen. She lowered her voice to a whisper. "They think it was Jeff Wayland," she stated, feeling almost certain that he was the attacker.

"Oh my God!" Kimmy blurted. "I know who that guy is! He's the ghoul who lives by the graveyard! But would he attack you?"

Mary shamefully admitted, "I used to date him." She racked her brain for a logical explanation and shrugged. "I don't know why he's doing all this."

Shannon was aghast. "*You* used to date *that loser*?" she asked.

"Yes," Mary said. She felt like a fool. "He used to be really nice, or so I thought. But now he's harassing me and I don't know how to stop him."

Kimmy's mouth hung open. "You mean there's more?"

Mary nodded. "Yeah. It gets worse," she said. "He's been following me everywhere. Before I left my house tonight, I found my bracelet...." The sickening memory flashed through her mind, and she squeezed her eyes shut "My bracelet... you know, the one I lost a few days ago? It was covered with blood." As Mary went on, she became more and more certain that Jeff was behind all of the recent disturbances, and she wondered how much further he would go.

"Gross! How macabre!" Shannon cried. "Do you think that—"

Kimmy cut in, "That he was the one at the mall last night? You said he's been following you. Right? Do you think that he might know where Tanya and Rob are?"

Mary cracked open a warm soda and took a long gulp. "I-I don't know. Maybe."

Shannon stomped her foot angrily and had to catch her balance on the counter. "Of course it was him! That sick bastard! I'm going to make him pay!" She dug furiously through her little gold evening bag. "Come on, you guys! Let's go!"

Mary's voice trembled. "Go? Go where?"

Shannon held up the shiny keys to her car and growled, "We're going to go pay *loser boy* a little visit!"

Shannon's judgment was clearly impaired by the alcohol as she stumbled out of the kitchen. Mary chased after her. "No! I'm not going to let you drive over there! You're too drunk and it's too dangerous! He might hurt you!" she warned.

Kimmy grabbed Shannon's keys. "I'll drive. I've got a can of pepper spray in my purse! We'll go throw some rocks and break a few windows on that sorry shack he calls a house!" Kimmy shouted. "Come on, Mary!"

Mary's voice quivered with fear as she imagined herself marching up to the madman's front door. "No. I can't go there. I-I'm afraid. Please, you guys! Don't leave!" she pleaded. "Please let the police handle it!"

"We'll be back soon. We're just going to go harass him a little," Shannon slurred, the smell of beer invading Mary's nostrils. "You stay here and be a good girl." Shannon slapped her on the back, making her cough.

Then Shannon and Kimmy ran down the driveway and disappeared into the dark night.

Mary felt totally frustrated by the stupid actions of her friends. "Great," she mumbled sarcastically.

Where was Josh, anyway? she wondered. This is his party, and I'm *supposed* to be his date.

Mary had walked around the entire lower level of the house and hadn't seen him anywhere.

Some date *this* is, she thought.

Mary noticed that the staircase was blocked off with a roll of unraveled toilet paper. He's got to be up there, she told herself.

Just as she was about to break through the toilet paper barrier, Mary heard an uproar of laughter and yelling.

She peered through the sliding glass door and saw a large group of people clustered in a circle by the edge of pool. She decided to check it out before she ventured into no-man's-land.



Outside, steam billowed up from the heated water of the sparkling, kidney-shaped swimming pool. The laughter and shouting were growing louder. Mary heard a girl's voice screaming hysterically over the noise.

Something was wrong.

Mary ran across the lawn and poked her head through the circle of bodies.

She gasped when she saw her cousin and her friend. Michelle. Even on Halloween, their wild black clothing and ghost-white faces stood out from the rest of the crowd. Their black-painted mouths were hanging open in shock.

The girls were cornered by the entire football team, who were all wearing their uniforms, complete with helmets.

Julifer dug the heels of her pointy black ankle boots into the dirt as she tried to back away, while Michelle spat out curses at the boys.

A fat, hulking boy wearing the number forty-nine on his jersey bellowed: "Confess your sins and thou shalt be purified! Confess witches, or thou shalt be drowned!"

The stupid, drunken voices of the others howled with laughter as they slapped one another on the helmets.

Michelle spit in the bully's face. "Let us go, you pig!" she screeched.

The fat bully wiped the saliva off his nose and glared angrily at the girl. He looked at his buddies and laughed. "Did you hear what *it* called me?" He let out a hideous imitation of a pig squeal, which made the crowd double over with laughter. "Come on, let's do it!" he screamed.

Several of the boys grabbed the two screaming girls and swung them by the hands and feet over the water of the pool.

Julifer struggled furiously and whimpered, "Ow! You're hurting me! Let me go!"

Mary had seen enough. She stepped forward and screamed at the top of her lungs, "Stop!"

Her voice was louder and more authoritative than she'd expected it to be. The boys set the girls down for a moment and turned around to face her. "What did you say?" the leader of the group growled viciously.

All of their drunken, bloodshot eyes stared at Mary. "I said, stop it!" she yelled. "How dare you pick on two girls like that!"

Number forty-nine pointed his chunky finger at Mary. "I think she's one of them! Get her!" he howled to the others.

The disturbance gave Michelle and Julifer just enough time to writhe free from their drunken captors and sprint over the back fence of the property.

In an instant, the drunken jocks forgot about the punk girls and were grabbing at Mary.

Panic and instinct made Mary's strong legs carry her across the lawn with lightning speed. She darted across the yard and ran back through the house as half of the drunken football team stumbled after her. She burst out the front door and tore down the steep driveway.

Mary spotted Michelle and Julifer, who were sitting on the retainer wall in front of the house next door, talking to each other in hushed voices. Mary could hear a few obscene jeers being shouted down at them from the house. Luckily, no one followed them any farther.

Tears made Julifer's black eye makeup stream down her face in streaks. "We should have never come here. We don't belong. Not even on Halloween," she sobbed.

Mary collapsed on the sidewalk next to them. "Are you guys okay?" she panted.

"What do you think?" Michelle snarled.

Julifer fluffed up her ratted, bleached hair. "Thanks Mary. You really saved our butts," she admitted. "But you didn't have to do that."

"Yes I did," Mary said, smiling and putting a comforting arm around Julifer's shoulder. "We girls have got to stick together. Besides, what's family for anyway?"

Michelle averted her eyes and kicked the tire of a parked car with her red Dr. Martens. "Yeah. Thanks, *prom queen*."

Mary stared at Michelle until she was finally able to make direct eye contact. She noticed for the first time that beyond Michelle's tough exterior, she was actually quite frightened by the humiliating incident. "No problem," Mary said.

Michelle's nose ring gleamed as it caught the light from the street lamp. "Hey. Sorry about what I said to you at school." She made the peace sign with her fingers. "You're not a sellout. You're okay, Mary."

Mary returned the peace sign and looked up the driveway at Josh's house. "I've got to go back in there. Wish me luck."

"You're going back?" Julifer said in shock. "Oh no! They'll tear you apart in there! The jocks think you're one of us!"

A picture of Tanya and Rob came into Mary's mind. They were still missing. The reality of this fact far outweighed the fact that the mob of drunken jocks might start chasing her again, might even throw her into the pool if she wasn't careful. Right now, she didn't care. She had to locate Josh and find out about Tanya and Rob.

"I'll be all right. I just need to talk to Josh for a minute." Mary suggested, "If you guys want a ride home, I'll be back in a few minutes. I'm *totally* ready to leave this party."

Michelle laughed. "I think we'll just hang around out here for a while. But thanks." She pulled a switchblade and a piece of paper from her pocket. "We've got work to do." She unfolded the paper and explained, "Tire slashing. This is a list of the jocks' license plate numbers I've been compiling for weeks."

"Cool." Julifer smiled. "Let's do it, girlfriend!"

Mary couldn't help but giggle at their somewhat violent course of revenge. But she supposed that the punishment fit the crime. "Okay. Have fun, you two. I'll see you around."

Mary took a deep breath and braced herself. She waved to the two girls and trudged back up Josh's steep driveway.

# CHAPTER

## 12

Kimmy's earlier display of bravery totally dissolved as she drove Shannon's car down the isolated dirt road by the cemetery. The gleaming moon illuminated hundreds of gray tombstones jutting out of the hillside, casting eerie shadows across the cemetery lawn.

"There's Jeff Wayland's house—if you can even call it a *house*." Kimmy pointed, her voice trembling. "Maybe this isn't such a good idea. I don't think we should provoke him."

"Keep driving!" Shannon slurred. "That way!"

Kimmy gulped as they got closer to the run-down little shack just outside the twisted iron gates of the graveyard. "No one's home. The lights are off. Let's just forget it and go back to the party," she suggested.

Before Kimmy had even stopped the car, Shannon flung open her door and jumped out. She stumbled into the dirt and cursed.

Kimmy got out and pulled her friend to her feet. "Come on Shannon. Let's just forget about it," Kimmy pleaded. This was a dumb idea. Let's go back."

We have a little *business* to take care of first!" Shannon shouted, her voice echoing through the cemetery.

Kimmy shrank back behind the car as Shannon fearlessly marched up to Jeff Wayland's door and began pounding on it with clenched fists. "Come on out, psycho boy!" she yelled. "We know you're in there!"

I can't believe we're standing here by the cemetery on Halloween, Kimmy thought.

*This is insane!*

The purple bruises on Mary's neck entered Kimmy's mind and she shivered. What if Jeff was in there? What if he decided to attack them too?

She let out a relieved breath when Shannon finally gave up and staggered back to the car.

Shannon was really worked up and angry... and drunk, Kimmy thought.

"I know he's in there. He's hiding," Shannon decided. She raised her voice and shook her fist at the house. "Hiding! Creep boy is a *wimp* and he's *hiding*!" She picked up a large rock and hurled it at the window. The rock missed and hit the side of the house.

"Chill out, Shannon!" Kimmy hissed. "Let's go!"

Just as Shannon was about to open her car door, she stopped dead in her tracks. She pointed her finger toward the middle of the cemetery. "Over there!" she whispered. "There he is! Let's go sneak up on creep boy and see what he's doing!"

Kimmy glanced over her shoulder and squinted at the tiny light coming from the center of the graveyard. A hot wave of fear washed through her body, and her knees suddenly felt weak. "Oh no, Shannon! We're not going out there!"

Shannon felt fearless and had her clouded mind made up. "We'll sneak up on him," she declared, as if she'd just thought up some brilliant plan.

Kimmy protested, "And what? Attack him? Are you totally psycho? Did you see what he did to Mary?" She stomped her foot on the ground. "We're leaving! Now!" she demanded.

Shannon ignored Kimmy's logic and stumbled through the open gates of the cemetery. She disappeared across the moss-covered tombstones, toward the light.

Kimmy threatened, "Shannon Geary! You come back here! Shannon!" It was no use. Shannon kept walking, deeper and deeper into the cemetery.

Kimmy pulled out her tiny can of pepper spray and cautiously chased after her stubborn friend to persuade her to leave the cemetery.

Kimmy's heart thudded heavily inside her chest. Her eyes fixed upon the faraway light.

*There was definitely something out there... and it wasn't good.*

An evil presence seemed to be looming within the walls of the cemetery. Kimmy's feet crunched along the weed covered ground as

she tried to catch up with Shannon. The fear welled up in her stomach.

She suddenly remembered a scene in a horror movie where the rotting hands of corpses reached up out of the ground to grab the ankles of...

*It was just a movie... just a movie*, she told herself in an attempt to suffocate the panic and fear she was feeling.

Kimmy held the pepper spray in front of herself defensively. Even though she was terrified, she couldn't let Shannon out of her sight. She was too irrational right now, too wasted to think straight.

Kimmy had almost caught up with her when a blood chilling shriek filled the air. Fear pumped through her veins as she ran toward Shannon. Toward the scream.

Shannon stood frozen before the arc of light, her slim figure silhouetted against a giant tombstone.

Kimmy ran up behind Shannon and cried out in horror when she saw what had made her friend scream.

The eerie flickering light was coming from a grinning jack-o'-lantern that sat burning atop a crumbling tombstone.

Shannon looked helplessly back at Kimmy with her mouth agape and pointed with trembling fingers to the etchings on the moss-covered stone.

*It was Judith Myers's grave.*

*Michael Myers's dead sister.*

Kimmy shrank back in horror when she realized whose grave this was. "Oh my God! This is too creepy! Let's go!" she cried.

Even Shannon, in her drunken stupor, was completely freaked out by the bizarre scene. She backed away from the sickening shrine and slipped on the slick ground, tripping over another grave marker and landing on her rear end on the muddy ground.

Kimmy held her hand out to Shannon and pulled her up. "Come on! We've got to get out of here!" she whispered, frantically looking around for the madman who was responsible for this.

*What if he's here right now... watching us!* Kimmy thought.

The girls frantically made their way through a dizzying obstacle course of headstones and mud patches toward the cemetery gate.

They had nearly reached the iron-gated exit and could see Shannon's car when a hulking figure suddenly jumped out in front of them.

Kimmy screamed and Shannon stumbled backward, aghast at what their eyes told them was blocking their path.

*It can't be! This is some kind of sick prank.*

*Oh God! No!*

A guttural growl came from the mouth of the thing as he moved closer with ferocious speed. He wore a mud caked jumpsuit and a white, plastic mask that was spattered with blood. A gleaming knife was clutched in his filthy hand and his black eyes were as cold as death.

*This can't be real!*

*Michael Myers doesn't exist!*

Before she knew it, Kimmy's finger had dispensed a stream of pepper spray directly into the thing's face. He didn't move. He didn't flinch.

Shannon screamed as he bared his yellow teeth at them.

Fear moved Kimmy's feet away from him and she yanked Shannon by the hand, pulling her back into the cemetery to escape the nightmarish monster that was going to kill them.

*"Run! Run!"* Kimmy yelled. *If we can just make it to the back wall!* she thought.

Kimmy ran through the darkness screaming for help at the top of her lungs. She was gradually being overtaken by a dreamlike feeling. Nothing was real. Everything was upside down and spinning.

She realized to her horror that Shannon's hand had slipped out of hers somewhere out there and that she was now running alone. Her legs became numb; her heart threatened to explode.

She could see the wall now. Just a few more yards...

*Don't look back. Don't look—*

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Shannon's scream echoed through the cemetery as she felt herself falling. She'd tripped and struck her head against a tombstone. The

sharp crack of her skull against the stone seemed to numb her lower body. She tried to get up, tried to move her legs.

*"Move! Damn it! Move!"* she screamed. Yet no sound came from her mouth.

The footsteps crunched above her broken body and she knew that this was the end. Her mouth could not be coaxed to open and scream again. Her eyelids fluttered as she realized the truth.

It was Michael Myers who was looking down upon her. The dead eyes behind the mask stared down at her, and his arm raised. A stench of rotten flesh and blood came from his mouth as he growled. With crushing force, he viciously drove the knife through her chest several times. Her blood showered down like raindrops across her face. She could not feel the razor-sharp blade ripping through her chest... only the suffocation as her lungs filled with blood. The horrifying image of Michael Myers burned through her mind. The darkness closed in around her and she knew that she was dying. Everything went black.

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Kimmy screamed out in the darkness. "Shannon!"

As her own terrified voice reverberated off the wall, she instantly knew that she was alone with...

*Michael Myers!*

*"Somebody help me!"*

Just as her terrified mind had imagined, swift, heavy footsteps squished across the grounds, moving closer to the wall. Kimmy glanced back and saw the silhouette of the dark figure moving in on her.

Horror filled her brain as she watched Michael Myers stumbling down the grade toward her. The gleaming blade of his knife glistened in the moonlight.

*Climb! Climb!*

Dry screams croaked from her throat as she clawed at the towering wall of bricks, trying to hoist her body over it. She couldn't stop screaming. Her fingernails dug into the cement blocks. With a



sickening popping sound, a few of her fingernails snapped off and were ripped away from her fleshy nail beds. She fell and tumbled backward.

"Aaaaaugh!"

She felt her body roll in slow motion like a Grand Prix race car, spinning and sliding out of control.

*I'm going to die!*

A mist of acrid, rotten breath emitted from behind the white, plastic mask. His cold, lifeless eyes had no soul, a fact that was almost more terrifying than the deadly situation. Her bleeding fingers throbbed and she screamed out in agony.

Michael Myers raised the blood-soaked knife and slashed it across her bare arm, delivering another shot of severe pain. She stumbled to her feet and pleaded for mercy.

"Don't kill me! Oh please! No! Don't kill me!" she begged.

The face behind the mask seemed to twist into a cruel grimace as Michael Myers gripped the handle of the razor sharp instrument.

"Please! No!" she screamed as she stepped backward against the wall. She was trapped. The pain pulsed though her sliced-up limb.

Michael Myers lunged at her and the knife descended downward. Kimmy's body pitched forward as he plunged the sharp-bladed instrument into her stomach and twisted it with brutal force. Deep, red blood and rattails of intestines spilled out of the gaping wound as he extracted the knife. Her broken body crumbled to the ground and lay motionless.

All was silent in the cemetery.

# CHAPTER

## 13

Mary reached the top of the driveway and quickly slipped by a pair of football players as they staggered into the hedges. A sickening retching sound came from somewhere in the yard. Mary's stomach turned as she ducked inside the entryway to the massive house.

Inside, the action was definitely heating up. A drunken girl with very short brown hair wearing a cheap French maid costume was dancing on the coffee table and lifting up her skirt. An intoxicated crowd of teenage boys hooted and cheered her on as she slipped a red garter belt down her thigh and swayed her hips to the pulsing music that pumped out of the stereo.

Boy, is she going to be sorry tomorrow, Mary thought, looking at the stupid girl.

One of the football players grabbed at the girl, which seemed to frighten her a little. She looked around and instantly sobered up. A wave of panic and remorse seemed to wash over her face as she stared out at the leering sea of pimpled faces.

Without thinking about the consequences, Mary pushed her way through the crowd of boys and pulled the girl down from her little living room stage. The music suddenly snapped off and the hulking leader of the earlier mischief with her cousin grabbed Mary by the shoulders.

"You don't give up, do you, you little goody-goody tramp!" he bellowed. "We're just trying to have a little fun!"

Mary wished she hadn't interfered and had just gone about her business. She stammered, "I-I..."

The French maid burst into tears of shame and ran out of the room as the crowd of boys stared angrily at Mary for spoiling their good time.

Another football player entered the room and cocked his head to the side as he stared hard at Mary. "Hey. I know you," he stated drunkenly. "You're the stupid chick who rescued the witches!" He

laughed, then grabbed Mary's knee and squeezed it hard. "Yeah! It is you!"

Mary's face became scarlet. Everyone in the room was staring at her, nodding their heads in agreement. "N-No. It wasn't me—" she began to say.

The flabby lips of the hulking football player babbled to the crowd. "See! I told you she was a freak! Just like those punk chicks! She's trash!" His belly shook as he howled, "I can spot a freak a freaking mile away!"

He grabbed at her chest and chuckled when she winced with disgust. Instinctively, Mary raised her palm and swung. Her blow landed on the side of his helmet, nearly breaking her hand. His laughing face became a mask of rage as he realized she'd just tried to hit him. But before he could respond, Mary elbowed him in his soft gut and took off running.

Mary broke through the toilet-papered staircase like a runner finishing a marathon. Obscene jeers and heavy footsteps followed behind her.

At the top of the staircase, Mary hesitated for a moment, trying to decide which direction to take down the long corridor. There were so many doors in this house!

*Where was Josh!*

She turned to the right. Her low heels clicked down the polished hardwood floor.

At the end of the hall, Mary noticed a light coming from a half-open door. She poked her head inside and found Josh lying across his bed on a plaid flannel comforter. A black Dracula cape was draped across his bare chest.

He smiled at her and said, "I was just thinking about you."

Mary slammed the door shut and snapped the lock. Tears welled up in her eyes as she slumped against the wall. She could hear sounds of footsteps and angry yelling down the hall from the boys who were chasing her.

She looked to Josh for help and realized that he was completely wasted. His body rolled off the bed and clunked to the floor. He

looked up at her. "I want to suck your blood!" he said, laughing ghoulishly.

Mary yanked him into a sitting position. "Josh! You have to get up! They're trashing your house!"

Josh looked around as if he didn't know where he was. "Who?" he asked dumbly.

"The hundreds of people downstairs!" she informed him, still shaky from the incident with the mob of drunken jocks.

Josh shook his spinning head. He took a deep breath and blinked his eyes lazily. "Oh yeah," he laughed. "The maids will clean it up," he stated casually, swiping his tousled hair back.

"You don't understand!" she protested, trying to break through to him. "They're ruining the furniture and..."

Josh looked dreamily at Mary and steadied his voice. "Come here. I want to tell you something," he said. He reached out and grabbed her wrist.

Mary rolled her eyes and allowed him to pull her over to him. "What?" she said.

He's so cute and harmless, she thought.

Suddenly, his grip tightened.

"What are you doing? Josh?" she asked, surprised by the aggressive behavior of this guy who'd practically been asleep just a moment ago.

His sour breath made her head instinctively turn away. He whispered, "I want you. Right now."

Mary realized that he was dead serious. "Josh, stop it," she protested. "You're drunk. You don't know what you want."

With a surge of strength, Josh pulled Mary to the floor, his nails digging into her wrist. He gave her a rough, forceful kiss. "You've made me wait too long, you little tease!" he shouted.

Mary struggled to get away from him, but he was too strong. He grabbed her necklaces with his free hand and yanked her toward him. Hundreds of glass and plastic beads bounced and scattered across the hardwood floor.

"Josh! Stop it!" she screamed as the situation escalated.

"No! I always get what I want!" he cried out like a spoiled child.

Mary suddenly remembered Jeff Wayland's warning. Something about last New Year's Eve. Something to do with a girl. She spat out furiously, "Is this what you did on New Year's Eve?"

Josh froze for a moment, his handsome features twisting into an ugly rage. "Who told you about that? Who!" He demanded.

Mary lied, "Everyone, Josh! They all told me what you did!" she cried, trying to figure out what to do or say next.

Josh exploded. "That chick was a whore! She deserved it!"

Mary couldn't *believe* what she was hearing. Didn't want to believe it. She leapt to her feet. "I'm leaving!"

Josh grabbed her wrist again and growled, "You're not going anywhere!"

Mary panicked and tried to reason with him. "Josh, you're really scaring me! Let me go! You don't want to do this! Please!" she cried, grabbing the car keys from her evening bag.

Josh jumped up and backed her into the corner of the room. An insane glow danced in his eyes and a purple vein throbbed in his neck.

In an attempt to get away, Mary swiped at him with her car keys and nicked the side of his face. A stream of blood dripped down his cheek from the tiny, stinging cut.

He stopped for a moment and touched the blood with his fingers. Rage stormed in his eyes when he realized that she'd cut him. He lunged at her and grabbed the ring of keys from her hand, then shouted something inaudible and threw the keys out the window, somewhere into the darkness of his backyard.

"You're not going anywhere!" he screamed.

Mary trembled as he backed her into the corner. As a last resort, she kicked him hard in the crotch, and he crumbled over in pain. She scrambled out of the room, raced down the hall, and stumbled down the staircase.

Josh burst out of his bedroom and leaned over the railing. His face was nearly blue with anger. He screamed, "Come back here! Mary! I said come back here, you slut!"

Everyone was staring. Mary ran outside and didn't stop.

Josh chased after her in a blind rage.

She raced down the driveway and tripped in the gravel. Her thin skirt tore, exposing her knees to the sharp little rocks. Dull, scraping pain shot through her legs. She winced and saw him barreling after her as she scrambled to her feet. Tears began to well up in her eyes.

Before she could run away, Josh had caught up with her on the dark street. He collided into her and she fell back ward into a hedge. He grabbed her hand and pulled her to her feet. "I'm sorry, Mary. Please. I'm sorry!" he panted.

Mary backed away from him. Her wrist was hurting from his tight grip. She struggled to break free, her eyes wide with terror.

Mary jerked her hand backward and screamed at him, "Leave me alone! Let me go!"

Not far away, Michelle extracted the switchblade from a tire and victoriously savored the sound of air hissing out toward flatness. *Sweet revenge*, she thought. She looked up when she heard the scream.

Julifer's painted eyes darted around the quiet street. "What was that?" she whispered. "I thought I heard someone yelling!"

Michelle slipped the blade into the pocket of her leather jacket and peeked out over the trunk of the car she'd just vandalized. "I don't know. It sounded like it came from over there," she said, pointing, then ducking behind the car. "Let's get out of here before we get caught," she added nervously.

Julifer was still searching the street. The yelling had stopped. Then something caught her eye, "Look!" she whispered, wrapping her black trench coat around her shoulders.

Michelle saw it too. There was some kind of struggle going on in the bushes a couple of doors down from Josh's house. "It's probably just some jocks fooling around. Maybe Biff and Buff are going for it!" she said sarcastically.

"But I heard a *girl* yelling," Julifer said intensely. "I'm going to check it out. She might be in trouble."

"So what! It's not our problem!" Michelle snorted.

Julifer grabbed Michelle by the hand and reminded her, "So! Remember what happened to us earlier? What if Mary had said, so

*what, it's not my problem?* We'd have been drowned in the pool or... worse."

Michelle rolled her eyes, knowing that Julifer was right. They cautiously crept across the street.

# CHAPTER

## 14

Jeff Wayland buzzed down the dirt road on his motor scooter carrying a bag of milk and a loaf of bread in the rickety wire basket on the handlebars. The holes in his jeans and lightweight windbreaker did nothing to protect him from the biting-cold air. His longish blond hair whipped back out of his eyes, and he couldn't wait to get inside and light a fire in the his fireplace. As he approached his house, he saw a gleaming black BMW parked on the gravel. The driver's door was open, illuminating the empty, leather upholstered cab.

He parked the scooter and grabbed the bag of groceries. Carefully, he moved toward the car and peered around in the darkness for some sign of the owner. He noticed that the cemetery gates were cracked open.

"Oh great." He sighed, looking at the personalized license plate of the car that abbreviated "Spoiled Brat." He realized that the car belonged to Shannon Geary, Mary's snobby friend.

What on earth is she doing in there? he wondered, remembering that it was Halloween, remembering the—

The old gate creaked warningly in the wind. Jeff peered out into the graveyard and saw it.

*Oh God!* It was there, unmistakably there....

A faint, flickering light glowed from the middle of the cemetery, just as it had the other night. He'd seen it a few nights ago. Tried to warn Mary. He knew the light shone from Judith Myers's grave.

Fear flooded through Jeff's body. "Oh no! Oh God no!" he whispered.

Something was wrong—*something was really wrong.*

Jeff dropped the plastic bag and crept past the wrought iron gates, ducking behind tombstones as he moved silently toward the light.

Almost against his will, his shaky legs carried him closer and closer. The grinning jack-o'-lantern became visible atop what he knew to be Judith Myers's tombstone. He looked away quickly,



trying to understand. He didn't need to look any closer; he knew that someone had just been out there. Had lit the candles...

Jeff lunged behind a thick tree trunk a few yards away from the stone and tried to catch the breath that wheezed out of his mouth. Shock and terror ripped through his brain.

Where was Shannon? Had she done this?

*Had Michael Myers been here?*

It didn't make sense. His mind tumbled with fear and confusion.

He took a deep breath and forced himself to look at the tombstone. To look at the—Jeff gulped—lumps on the ground...

Jeff screamed out in horror as his numbed body stumbled backward in shock over what he'd just discovered.

*What he hadn't seen a moment ago...*

The limp bodies of Shannon Geary and Kimmy Harrison were slumped on either side of the tombstone. Two pairs of glassy, cold eyes stared lifelessly at him. Their blood-soaked clothing was barely visible in the dim, flickering candlelight.

Even though his mind told him they were dead, he rushed over to the girls and ripped off his jacket. The blond one was dead for sure—he knew instantly by the sickening pile of glistening intestines that spilled out from her body. But Shannon, oh God! He wrapped his jacket around her shoulders and tried to feel her pulse, some sign of life. Her body was still warm, but collapsed in a heap at his touch. She was dead too.

Jeff sprang to his feet, knowing instantly what had happened to them, who had done this. The name repeated over and over in his mind.

*Michael Myers... Michael Myers... The Bogeyman.*

*Be quiet! Get back to the house!* he told himself.

The tombstones became a blur and everything was spinning as he ran down the path through the cemetery.

*Don't look back.*

Jeff fished out his keys and burst through the door of his house. He picked up the phone to dial the police.

The line was dead... dead just like the girls.

In a panic, he burst out the door and jumped on the scooter. His body was numb with fear. He had to get help, had to warn everyone.

Jeff jammed the key into the ignition of the scooter, which groaned to life with a mechanical rattling sound. A cloud of dust rose up as he disappeared down the road toward town.

Jeff cranked the gas handle back as far as it would go.

Within minutes, he found himself passing through Haddonfield Estates on the way into town. He remembered that Josh Pinder was having a party. Maybe Mary was there. Everyone was there. It would only take another minute to drive by. Instinctively, he veered up the hill to the house. Mary would still be there, and safe... he hoped.

# CHAPTER

## 15

Josh grabbed Mary's wrist again and was drunkenly trying to apologize. He wouldn't let her go.

Suddenly, his body was jerked backward toward the ground. He whipped around and snarled grotesquely like a wild animal at the two girls standing above him.

Mary instinctively backed away from him and pulled herself up from the ground. She was too angry to cry, too humiliated to yell at him. She just wanted to leave.

Michelle's steel-toed boot crushed into Josh's bare chest. "You slime bag!" she screamed. "You freaking slime bag!"

"Stop it!" Mary screamed. "Let's get out of here."

Josh spit on the ground and laughed meanly at the two punk girls. He turned and growled at Mary, "Are these your *friends*? I should have known!"

He stood up and gave Mary a hard shove, knocking her to the ground again.

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Jeff Wayland followed the caravan of parked cars leading up to the Pinder estate.

All was quiet on the street except for the buzz of his scooter. For a moment the horrifying image of the dead girls was all he could see.

He snapped back to present time as a loud scuffle broke out in front of Josh's house. Through the dim light, he saw Mary being knocked to the ground by someone.

It was Josh Pinder! He was cursing at all three girls like a madman.

Adrenaline pumped through Jeff's body as he jumped off the scooter and let it fall in the middle of the street.

He jumped Josh Pinder from behind and the two boys fell to the ground. Jeff wasn't much of a fighter, but he didn't care right now, after everything that had happened.

*People were dead!*

*Michael Myers was on the loose!*

Jeff screamed out in pain when Josh kicked him hard in the leg. He had to stop this guy before he really hurt somebody. He had seen Josh's rage before.

Mary, Julifer, and Michelle backed away in shock as the boys became a blur of fists and violent blows. The three girls fled down the street.

As Mary ran, she wasn't sure who she was more afraid of: Jeff or Josh.

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Josh's fist pounded into the sore spot he'd created on Jeff's leg. Jeff cried out again, but managed to push Josh over backward onto the street and pin him down.

Jeff raised his fist above Josh's face. "You psycho! What the hell are you doing!" he screamed, his nostrils flaring with rage.

Josh struggled to break free of Jeff's surprisingly strong shoulder hold. "Let me go! This is none of your damn business, you freak!" he growled.

"Oh yeah? Well, it is my damn business when I see you attacking girls!" Jeff crushed Josh's shoulders back against the ground. "Is this becoming a hobby of yours? How many other girls have you attacked? Huh? Remember the night at the cemetery? I'll never forget the girl who came pounding on my door, her dress half ripped off! You're the freak, Josh!"

Josh grunted, "I'm not the one who attacked Mary the other night!"

Jeff crunched his knee into Josh's bare chest and envisioned his knuckles knocking out Josh's dazzling white teeth. "Maybe it was *you* who was in her house!" Josh said with a sneer, despite the pain that Jeff's weight was causing him. "Or maybe it was *Michael Myers*. Isn't he your best buddy?" he sang out.

Jeff could barely contain his anger and had to force himself to hold back his clenched fist. "You're *crazy*, man!" he shouted.

Josh spat, "Maybe so. But that's *our* little secret." Josh suddenly relaxed and smiled as a string of football players jogged down the driveway toward the fight. He whispered, "You'd better run for your life, *freak boy*." Josh suddenly turned on the emotion and screamed out to the jocks, "Help me, you guys!"

Outnumbered and knowing that the meatheaded jocks would take Josh's side, Jeff fled down the street. He didn't have time to pick up his scooter. He followed after the girls, who were way down the block.

Josh shook an accusing finger at Jeff and cracked out orders to the jocks like a drill sergeant, "Get him! Catch him! *Now!*"

Jeff glanced back and saw a battalion of football players, led by Josh, stumbling down the street after him.

The pain stabbed through his leg as he ran with a limp toward Mary and the two punk girls.

Mary spun around and saw Jeff Wayland being chased by Josh and the entire football team. "Oh my God!" she cried.

The three girls rounded the corner by a clearing in the woods. Mary grabbed Julifer's pale fingers, which were coated with chipping black nail polish, and pulled her into the dark forest. Michelle ducked behind a tree.

Jeff had lost sight of the girls and knew that he could no longer outrun the jocks. But maybe he could outsmart them. They were closing in on him faster and faster as his body seemed to move in slow motion.

He rounded the corner and slipped on the gravel.

Michelle jumped out from behind the tree and pulled him back into the darkness.

"Oh no!" Mary whispered to Julifer, seeing Jeff Wayland being invited into their safe little haven. "*He's* crazy too!"

"Shhhhhhhhh!" Julifer motioned.

They all stood frozen in fright as the army of jocks ran past their dark hideaway and down the road.

After the jocks had run past them, Michelle giggled and whispered, "Duh? Which way did they go, George?"

"Be quiet!" Mary hissed. She turned her back disgustedly on Jeff, who was staring at her through pain-racked eyes.

When the jocks finally gave up their search and began to wander off, Jeff whispered hysterically, "Mary! Your friends are dead! I found them in the graveyard. We've got to get to a phone! Got to get help!"

"W-What?" she stammered, not believing what she'd just heard.

Jeff slowly repeated himself. "Shannon and Kimmy are... dead," he croaked.

The dark sky seemed to be closing in on Mary. *This isn't happening, this can't be—*

"It's true," he told her, grabbing her hand. "I found their bodies by Judith's tombstone and they were all—" Suddenly looking as if he was going to be sick, he stopped himself from revealing the gruesome details.

Mary looked completely freaked out. He wasn't sure she believed him.

Mary jerked her hand away from him. "You're a liar!" she spat, her eyes burning. "Just get away from me! Leave me alone!" she demanded.

"Please, Mary! Michael Myers is back," Jeff whispered, the terrifying memory stuck in his mind. "You've got to believe me. We're all in grave danger. We've got to get help!"

Mary snarled, "You're the one who needs help! You're the one who left the bracelet in my room! Weren't you!"

Jeff shook his head in confusion. "What?"

"The bracelet!" Mary accused. "I found it tonight, all covered in blood. Whose blood was it, Jeff? Huh? Don't lie to me!"

"No! I'd never do something like that!" Jeff's eyes were pleading, "Please, Mary! You've got to believe me!"

Julifer's expression went blank as she listened to their insane conversation. "Michael Myers? People dead? Are you two crazy?" she snapped sharply.

Tears brimmed in Jeff's eyes. "No." He shook his head. "I wish this weren't happening. I wish I could just wake up from this nightmare." He turned to face Mary. "He's after you—I know he is. He was in your

room the other night, I saw someone go in your house and went in after him, and he knocked me out cold! *Remember, Mary Please!*"

Mary thought hard, trying to recall the attack. She knew she hadn't hit anyone hard enough to knock him out, yet Jeff had suffered a concussion. "I-I don't know," Mary cried. "I can't remember it that well."

"Think, Mary! Come on!" he coaxed.

Mary squeezed her eyes shut and remembered the shadows, the snarling noises, how the attacker had seemed to be everywhere, how he'd grasped her ankle after she pushed him backward.

Mary suddenly realized that there had to have been two people in there with her. Jeff couldn't have been the only one...couldn't have been pushing and pulling at the same time. Her eyes became wet with confused, fearful tears. "I don't know what to think anymore," she whimpered. "I think I'm going crazy!"

Jeff whispered, "Michael Myers thinks you've invaded his territory. He must have left the bracelet in your room as a warning. Everyone knows he always comes *home* before his attacks...." His voice trailed off.

Mary believed him. She took long look at his pain-stricken face and knew that he was telling the truth. Maybe it was the tears in his eyes, or the way he was pleading with her—

A new breed of fear suddenly washed over her.

She didn't want to believe that a bloodthirsty ghoul like Michael Myers could possibly exist. Not on this planet, not in her pleasant little life...

*But this was all too real. It was really happening.*

*What about Tanya and Rob!* she wondered in terror. *Were they dead too?*

"M-My house," Mary finally stammered. "It's the closest, and I have to warn my parents. Let's go."

Michelle and Julifer looked at each other helplessly and pulled Jeff up from the ground.

Julifer stared at a cut on Jeff's face that he suffered during the fight. "You're bleeding. Are you sure you're okay?"

"I have to be. We have to go back there. We don't have a choice," Jeff said, then winced.

A sense of responsibility hung over Mary's head, for the four of them. Forcing herself to be strong and to concentrate on getting them all back to safety, she turned to Julifer and Michelle. "Take off, you guys," she said.

Julifer protested, "No Mary. You need our help. We want to go with you. We owe you."

"If you want to help, go home where you'll be safe. Then I won't have to worry about you," Mary said.

"All right. But call us as soon as you can to let us know you're okay. And thanks for getting us out of that jam earlier, Cousin."

Mary watched the two girls disappear down the road, then looked at Jeff. "Let's go." He stumbled behind Mary down the road toward her house.



# CHAPTER

## 16

Mary and Jeff made their way down the isolated, winding road toward her house. The trees in the thick forest swayed and blew in the gusty wind, as if beckoning them to turn back. The clouds broke up a little and a gleaming full moon shone down from above. Dense carpets of plants and trees grew thickly on both sides of the road, so thickly that the lights of downtown Haddonfield were blocked out. There were no streetlights on the little two-lane highway, which forced the group to travel cautiously on the dark shoulder of the road.

"It's just another half mile," Mary huffed, looking back at Jeff, whose face was screwed up in a grimace of pain. Josh really must have hurt him, she thought.

"He's out here somewhere," Jeff panted. "We've got to hurry!"

Mary still didn't know what to think about Jeff Wayland and his wild story. Nonetheless, she wrapped an arm around his shoulder to help him hobble along. "Did you really find bodies in the cemetery?" she asked fearfully. "Please tell me this is some kind of prank."

"I wish it were," Jeff said, his heart pounding heavily. "But I'm not making this up. You've got to believe me. He's *very* alive, and he's back."

Mary tried to concentrate on getting them back to her house safely. But she couldn't stop thinking about her friends.

*Her dead friends...*

Jeff continued, "He's out there somewhere. Right now. We don't have much time. God only knows how many others he'll kill before he's stopped!"

Suddenly, there was a crash in the woods not more than twenty yards away.

Fear struck through Mary's heart and caused her aching legs to move even faster.

"What was that?" Mary cried, pulling on Jeff's arm.

Heavy footsteps crackled in the darkness.

"I don't know," Jeff said, his voice betraying panic. "Just keep running!"

The footsteps got closer and closer to the road and were now just a few paces behind them.

*"Keep running!"*

Mary's heart thudded rapidly with fear and exhaustion as her aching legs kept moving.

She glanced over her shoulder. Suddenly, a loud crash in the woods filled the air. The footsteps stopped.

Mary figured that whoever was chasing them had fallen down on the vine-tangled ground.

They kept running. Mary could see her house just around the bend. Right before they crossed the street, the footsteps began crunching again on the leaf-covered ground.

Except that now, the footsteps seemed heavier and faster than before.

Mary suddenly thought of Michael Myers. The thought made her entire body feel numb. "Cross the street, Jeff!" she screamed.

"Mary, wait... it's okay," Jeff said, placing a hand on her arm. "It's only the neighbor's dog."

Mary glanced back, saw that he was right, and sighed with relief. "Come on, we have to call the cops," she said.

Jeff tried to catch his breath as Mary struggled to unlock the door. After she finally got it open, she slumped against the wall and wearily pointed to the phone on the table.

Jeff picked up the phone and dialed the police.

He panted into the receiver, "This is Jeff Wayland. There's been a double murder. Please hurry! The bodies are in the Haddonfield cemetery. I'll meet you there."

Mary cautiously watched Jeff as he spoke into the phone. She was certain now that he wasn't the killer. After all, if he was, why would he have called the police?

*The killer?*

She still couldn't believe that her friends were... *dead*.

Jeff's call to the police confirmed her worst nightmare: He wasn't fooling around.

Jeff told Mary, "Stay here and keep the doors locked. I'm going to the cemetery. I'll be back soon or I'll send help to make sure you're okay."

Mary nodded fearfully. "Can you make it to the cemetery in this condition?"

"It's just a few more blocks," he panted.

"Wait!" Mary said. She opened a closet and pulled out a wooden baseball bat. "You might need this."

# CHAPTER

## 17

The police had already arrived at the cemetery by the time Jeff got there. Blue and red lights from three squad cars pulsed throughout the cemetery, and the yellow beams of flashlights shone eerily across the tombstones and ancient trees.

When he reached the gate Jeff instinctively turned away. He didn't know if he could handle seeing the dead bodies again.

Jeff set the baseball bat down on the ground and took a deep breath as he stepped through the gates.

Jeff approached a fat, balding police chief who was mopping his perspiring head with his sleeve. He tapped him on the shoulder. "I'm Jeff Wayland. I live right over there. I reported the murders."

Seeing blood on the teen's face, the chief looked suspiciously at him. "Where are the bodies, son?" he asked.

"This way," Jeff said, pointing. "In the middle of the cemetery."

The chief and another officer, their guns drawn, followed Jeff's lead as he led them down the path of broken stepping-stones into the darkness.

The flickering light of the jack-o'-lantern was gone. Jeff figured that the gusty winds must have blown it out.

Jeff approached the tombstone and squinted his eyes shut as he stepped in front of it. He didn't think he could stomach seeing the girls again, the horrible mess. "Right there," he directed, then quickly turned away.

The officers crept forward and shone their flashlights on Judith's tombstone. The chief cringed at first, thinking he saw blood, but then realized that it was only hardened red wax that had dripped out of the grinning mouth of the jack o'-lantern.

Jeff opened one eye and sucked in his breath. "They're gone!" he cried. "T-The bodies are gone!"

The chief grabbed Jeff's shoulder roughly. "Is this your idea of a prank, boy?"

Jeff stammered, "N-No! They were right there. Two girls!"

He wondered if Kimmy and Shannon had played a trick on him, if they'd just been pretending to be dead.

No, he thought, remembering their eyes and the horrible mess. He was sure they had been dead. Jeff spun around in panic and confusion.

The chief tightened his grip. "What did you say your name was, boy?" he questioned sharply.

"Jeff Wayland, sir," he gulped.

*Where were the bodies!*

The deputy stared hard at Jeff through slitted eyes. "Say. You're that kid we picked up at the Old Myers Place a few days ago. You attacked a girl!"

"B-But you let me go. Remember? There were no fingerprints," Jeff reminded him.

The chief poked his meaty finger into Jeff's chest. "Maybe you own a pair of gloves," he growled.

Another officer shouted from below the next row of crumbling tombstones and then appeared, carrying something in his arms. "We found this, chief! Over there!" he shouted.

The officer held up a blood-soaked jacket.

Fear flooded through Jeff's body. It was his jacket! The one he'd draped around the dead girl's shoulders. And it was dripping with sticky red blood! The officer pulled out a wallet from the jacket pocket.

*Oh no!, Jeff thought, panicking. When they find my ID...*

*They wouldn't understand! He had to get back to Mary!*

Without thinking, Jeff bolted away from the officers.

"Stop him!" the chief bellowed.

*Mary! I've got to get to Mary, Jeff thought.*

*If it's not too late...*

## CHAPTER

### 18

The old grandfather clock ticked the seconds away as Mary nervously peered out the front window from behind the curtains.

*Where was Jeff? Where was the help he'd promised to send?*

Mary felt like sobbing, like giving up. This had been the worst night of her life.

Mary forced herself to be strong. Everything will be okay, she told herself. She was repulsed by her dirty skin. Right now, all she wanted to do was get out of her costume and take a shower. If she could only wash the memories of this horrible night down the drain.

She went upstairs and washed her face with cold water and a bar of tangerine-scented soap. The cleansing suds felt refreshing as she scrubbed away the remnants of her Halloween makeup.

She yanked off her gold coin earrings and threw them to the tiled floor in disgust. She looked at her reflection and barely recognized herself. It was as if she were staring at a stranger, some girl with a really screwed-up life.

Everything seemed to be spinning; nothing made any sense. She choked back a sob and went into her room to get some clean clothes.

As Mary pulled open her dresser drawer, she caught a glimpse of something outside. A dark figure ran across her lawn and disappeared beneath the porch. But it was too dark, and had been too quick a glimpse, to allow her to make out the person's face.

Mary silently prayed that it was Jeff.

*Funny, she thought. Why hasn't he rang the bell yet or knocked on the front door?*

Panic flooded through Mary's body again a moment later. She remembered that Jeff had been limping earlier from the wound. The person outside had been running.

Mary's heart raced as she forced herself to look out the window. Seeing nothing, she opened the window and called down in a shaky voice, "Hello? Is someone out there?"

Downstairs from the back door came the sudden, electrifying sound of shattering glass.

"Oh no! Oh God no!" she whispered.

Mary could hear a pounding noise, followed by the sound of the back door creaking open. Then came a wild, crashing noise from the kitchen, as if the dishes were being pulled out of the cabinets and hurled onto the tile floor. A loud clatter of metallic things clattering on the floor could be heard.

Mary remembered that her mom had picked up the freshly sharpened knives this morning.

*The knives! Oh please no!*

Heavy footsteps moved across the broken glass with a crunching sound.

Barely able to stand, Mary backed into her bedroom closet and closed the door behind herself. The footstep clunked across the floor downstairs.

*Michael Myers was in the house.*

A jolt of shock ripped through her mind as she tried desperately to figure out a way to escape.

Mary was trapped; there was no way out. She held on to the doorknob in the closet and leaned back in an effort to prevent him from entering. The narrow walls seemed to be closing in on her. Her sweating palms caused her to lose her grasp of the knob and to tumble to the floor among the cardboard boxes.

The footsteps moved along the upstairs hall, each one creaking louder. *He was approaching her bedroom!*

Mary felt frozen to the floor. Then she became aware of a draft on her cheek from the space between the floorboards.

It was her only chance!

She dug her fingers under the loose floorboard and lifted up with all her strength. A few tiny nails popped out. She tugged harder. The board splintered and jaggedly snapped in half, throwing Mary back against the closet door.

The space was just barely big enough to enter. She looked down, but could see only black space below. There seemed to be a shaft leading from this floor to the bottom of the house.

Her bedroom door slammed open, making her shriek. Seeing no other choice, she lowered her body into the hole. Sticky cobwebs brushed against her dangling legs. She had hung there a moment, grasping the board with her fingers, when suddenly the closet door banged open.

Mary looked up through the hole and screamed out in horror when she saw Michael Myers. He snarled down at her like a vicious animal. Remnants of his dead, scarred skin and matted hair stuck out from behind the child's plastic mask. His black jumpsuit was caked with mud and torn, revealing hideously puckered, white scar tissue. She squeezed her eyes shut and fell into the darkness of the pit below.

In a split second, Mary felt her body crash to the hard, cold ground somewhere beneath her house. She could hear wood splitting above her and vicious growling and panting as Michael Myers ripped up the floorboards to come after her.

She struggled to pick up her sore body, which was wedged between what felt like two cold, damp walls. In the darkness, she used her hands to grope around, searching for a way out. The crashing from above became louder and more desperate. She felt as if she were going to suffocate. Her muffled cries stopped when she noticed a faint light around a corner.

She pulled hard against one wall and squeezed through the thin corridor toward the light.

Mary had to duck to avoid hitting her head on the support beams under the house. Her body shook with terror as she inched along.

The light was just around the corner... it was just—

Mary froze in horror and her mouth let out a hideous scream. A wave of nausea caused her to collapse to her knees.

A bright, grinning jack-o'-lantern cast a dancing light across the twisted faces of Tanya and Rob, whose dead skin was discolored and bruised. Their stiff bodies were sitting upright on a worn sofa, their blackened, blood-caked arms wrapped around each other.

Mary let out a horrified scream and became aware that she was kneeling in a pool of blood. There was blood everywhere—sticky, red blood on the floor, on their clothes, smeared on the walls....



Mary spun around, looking for a way to escape from Michael Myers and to get away from the deteriorating corpses of Tanya and Rob. Screams of madness echoed through her head.

Mary's body and mind were going completely numb. She knew that she was going to die if she didn't find a way out. Her eyes were fixed upon the grisly, rotting remains of Tanya and Rob as she stumbled backwards.

Suddenly, she backed up against something. She looked down at the floor and began screaming uncontrollably. Staring up at her through glassy, dead eyes were Shannon and Kimmy. The flickering light danced across their mutilated, bloodied bodies as if they were broken dolls.

She barely heard the loud crash and wild thrashing over the sounds of her own screaming. The noise was coming from the narrow corridor. Michael Myers was down there now... coming to kill her.

Mary knew that no one was going to help her now. She backed against the wall and continued to move backward, seeking a way out. Her heart hammered in her chest and she could barely breathe. She couldn't think as terror pounded through her veins.

"Somebody! Help me!" she screamed, her head spinning between this twisted reality and some other unimaginable nightmare.

# CHAPTER

## 19

Jeff's lungs felt as if they were on fire as he ran down the road toward Mary's house. There was no time to feel the throbbing pain, no time to think.

*Just get there!* he told himself.

His aching legs carried him closer and closer. As he ran, he could only think about Mary and how he had to save her.

At that moment, he realized that he was still in love with her. His mind flashed back to the day he broke the relationship off.

*Why was I so stupid! Why was I so afraid that she'd dump me when school started?*

He had to save her—had to get to her house before it was too late.

As he ran on, he'd figured out that Mary was Michael Myer's prized prey. All of the others had just been in the way. She was the one he was after.

He could see her house now, looming against the eerie black clouds, backlit by the full moon. There were lights on in her house. He could see her bedroom window.

Maybe everything is all right, he thought hopefully.

Jeff nearly collapsed from exhaustion when he finally reached Mary's front door. He pounded as hard as he could.

There was no answer. He frantically pressed the doorbell and tried to control his rapid breathing. He could hear the bell chiming gaily inside, but nothing else. He pressed his ear up against the door. "Mary! It's Jeff! Open up!" he cried.

Still no response.

He prayed that he hadn't arrived too late.

Jeff sprinted around to the back door and gasped when he saw the broken glass of the window scattered across the steps.

"No!" he screamed, his whole life, everything he cared about, seeming—like the glass—to have shattered.

Jeff burst through the back door and noticed a set of muddy footprints on the floor, covered with broken glass and crockery.

Gleaming kitchen knives were scattered everywhere. He cautiously followed the tracks across the floor and to the staircase. Something had happened in here. Something bad.

*He was still in the house!*

The chilling realization hit Jeff when he noticed that there was only one set of footprints and that they led up the staircase.

A mental vision of Mary's sweet face swept through his mind. He had to go up there and face whatever was waiting—even if it cost him his life.

Jeff crept up the stairs, quietly and cautiously following the muddy tracks. He stood silently in the upstairs hallway for a moment. There was no noise, not a cry, just dead silence.

He pushed open Mary's bedroom door. It creaked. He shut his eyes, afraid of what he might find.

A moment later, Jeff forced his fluttering lids to open.

There was nothing there.

His eyes followed the footprints to the closet door where they ended. His hands were trembling as he reached out to open the closet door.

There was nothing in the closet. Nothing but a bunch of old cardboard boxes and clothing strewn all over the floor. It was obvious that there had been an attack, a struggle, but where was Mary!

He screamed out, "Mary! Mary!"

Jeff stumbled downstairs and spun around trying to figure out what had happened.

Then he heard a noise like... a scream!

He forced himself to stand still and silent as he tried to detect where the cry had come from.

There! He'd heard it again. It was coming from outside somewhere!

Jeff unlocked the front door and bolted through the entryway.

*Where was she!*

Jeff whirled around in the darkness, listening for the scream again.

"Mary! Where are you?" he cried out into the night.

# CHAPTER

## 20

Under the house, Mary backed out of the chamber of horrors, away from the dead bodies of her friends. She was close to being pushed over the edge of sanity. She felt as if her world was closing in on her, as if her young life was coming to a horrible end. She knew that she would never forget what she'd seen tonight, that the horrible images had settled permanently in her mind. She'd never be the same again... *if she lived.*

*Fight back! You've got to fight to stay alive!*

Michael Myers crunched across the dirt floor toward her. She could hear his snarl just around the corner.

She could hardly see through the tears that streamed out of her eyes. She suddenly felt light-headed, as if she were in a dream.

*Find a weapon!* she told herself, suddenly snapped back into reality by her stalker's vicious growling.

Mary felt around on the ground, picked up a potato-sized rock, and grasped it in her sweating palm. Just as she was thinking that a rock wouldn't do her any good, his face, shrouded in that sickening white mask, appeared, staring at her. He hunched down and stepped closer, growling, a dry, rotting sound that made Mary's skin crawl. The heat of his fetid breath was just feet away.

Suddenly, his body lunged toward her.

Mary screamed and jumped back a few feet. Her body shook with hysteria. She was backed up against the cold wall.

In a blur of motion, Michael Myers jumped forward again. Mary screamed and dodged to the side just as he crashed violently into the far wall, exactly where she'd been standing.

Mary dropped the rock when she spotted a two-by-four on the ground. She grasped the heavy board in a shaking hand and was stunned by the sharp pain that suddenly riveted through her palm.

She whimpered and let go of the board. A rusty nail protruded from the end of the wood. Quickly she picked it up again and swung it around, holding the nail-side outward.

Michael Myers leapt at her. Using all her strength, she aimed the board at his rotting face, then swung it. With a sickening thwack, the nail sunk into his mask and pinned the board to his forehead.

Mary gasped as a trickle of blood seeped down the plastic mask between the eyeholes. He staggered backward.

Mary crouched down and ran through the darkness with out looking back.

*Oh God! Please help me get out of here alive!*

# CHAPTER

## 21

Jeff stared up at the moon from Mary's front lawn.

*Where was she!*

Then he heard her scream again. It was muffled and sounded very far away. He took a few steps toward the house. He heard it again, and this time realized that it was coming from below her house.

Jeff remembered that there was a large gap between the house and the ground on the side of it. He'd crawled into this gap a couple of times when he and his father were working on the plumbing last summer.

*He had to hurry!*

As Jeff ran toward the door, he saw Mary's horrified face pressed up against a screened air vent under the house. She was clawing at the metal wire and screaming hysterically.

"Help meeeeeee!!!!!" she screamed at Jeff. "He's going to kill me!"

The hair on the back of his neck stood on end as he listened to her screaming. He'd never heard anyone scream like that.

Jeff shouted back, "I'll be right there! Try to fight him off!"

Around the side of the house, Jeff dug at the ground, making a hole large enough for him to crawl through again. Jeff noticed smears of blood and bits of hair and flesh stuck to the frame of the house, which made him reel with nausea. He fought it off, then jumped forward and said a prayer as he entered the gaping hole under the house.

Jeff followed Mary's screams through the darkness under the house. The pungent odor of rot and death wafted through the damp crawl space.

A sharp pang of terror stabbed through his body when he stumbled across the four dead bodies, their faces twisted in hideous, horrified masks of death. He instantly recognized the two girls from the cemetery. Their faces and bodies were gashed and their clothing was soaked in fresh blood. The others had been dead for several days, he

estimated by their severely discolored skin... and the sickening smell....

"*Oh God!*" he whispered, forcing himself not to scream.

Jeff's throat tightened and he made himself turn away from the corpses. Somehow his rubbery legs carried him toward Mary.

At last, he saw her. She was whimpering and still clawing at the tiny screened window. Blood dripped from her raw fingers as she tried to pry the wire mesh out of its cement frame.

From out of the shadows, Michael Myers stumbled toward Mary. The filthy, withering flesh of his hand gripped a gleaming butcher knife.

"Mary!" Jeff screamed. "Look out!"

Jeff's voice having caused her to whip around, she saw that Michael Myers was now just a few feet behind her. She screamed and ducked out of the path of the descending knife.

Mary ran to Jeff, and Michael Myers came at them.

Jeff ordered her, "Go that way! There's an opening! Run! Run!"

Jeff found himself alone with Michael Myers, who was moving toward him. His pasty, rippled skin seemed to glow in the dark. His burning black eyes radiated pure evil.

Jeff frantically looked around for something, anything, to use as a weapon. But there was nothing but dirt and small rocks! As he backed up, he clunked his skull against something hard on the low ceiling.

The rusted plumbing pipe! He and his dad were planning to replace it next weekend. If he could only break a section free!

Jeff grabbed on to the middle of a fat pipe and ripped at the part that ran beneath the floor of the house. Using all his strength, he grunted and pulled a long section loose. A hard stream of water burst into his eyes. Jeff screamed from the pain as he grasped the metal pipe in his hands. Michael Myers lunged forward, and Jeff closed his eyes and held out the piece of pipe, its edges sticking out in sharp shards of rusted metal.

The weight and force of Michael Myers's own body caused the pipe to drive itself into the center of his chest. A blinding burst of blood and water sprayed hideously onto the floor. Another pipe broke loose

and more water spurted out from the ceiling, flooding and pooling across the basement floor.

Michael Myers struggled to break free from the pipe that had broken through his weakened ribs.

"You should be dead!" Jeff screamed, his dry voice cracking.

He rammed the pipe farther into Michael Myers's chest until it crunched all the way through his ribs and out his back. Jeff closed his eyes and pushed again, javelining the pipe completely through his body and up against the wall. Michael Myers twitched violently and sank to the wet, muddy floor.

Jeff stared at the hideous body of Michael Myers. His eyes, as black as a spider's, stared back. Jeff wasn't sure if he was dead, but he didn't want to wait and find out.

He put his hands to his face and screamed out into the darkness, "Mary! Are you still in here! Mary! Where are you!"

Jeff heard her whimpering and followed the muffled sounds, closing his eyes as he passed the dead bodies. The blood that soaked the ground made a squishing sound whenever his boots touched the floor. He fought another wave of nausea as he smelled the strong, rotten death smell that hung in the thick, damp air. Jeff grabbed the jack-o'-lantern and followed Mary's hysterical cries.

Jeff passed the hole, which she had obviously not seen. She had gone the wrong way and was under the other side of the house.

Jeff finally found her, clawing at another air vent. "Come on!" he shouted. "This way!" Her lower arms were covered with blood, and she was in shock.

Jeff dragged Mary by the hand toward the opening. Just as they reached it, a tremendous crashing noise broke the silence. A shadow suddenly loomed against the wall, and Michael Myers stumbled out of the darkness, the pipe still all the way through him. His unearthly, evil voice snarled as he tried to rip the blood-covered pipe out of his chest.

Mary screamed, and Jeff pushed her up through the hole. Michael Myers grasped the pipe with both rotting hands and yanked the metal rod out of his body. He held the long, heavy pipe and struck out at the couple. Jeff dodged the blow, which hammered against the



solid ground with an ear-splitting crash. As Michael Myers raised it to strike again, he accidentally hit another narrow pipe that ran along the ceiling.

A loud hissing filled the air and the smell of gas began to fill the crawl space.

"He broke the gas line!" Jeff screamed in horror.

The severe wound in his chest, now gushing with blood, caused Michael Myers to stumble backward.

There was no time to waste. Jeff tried to crawl out after Mary, but slipped on the wet ground.

Michael Myers began stumbling toward them again, his black eyes as cold as death. The smell of gas was choking. Mary reached down for Jeff's hand, and he managed to pull himself halfway through the opening. Suddenly, a thick hand grasped on to his ankle. Jeff cried out and kicked his foot backward as hard as he could. Michael Myers fell backward and Jeff was able to hoist himself out and dive to safety on the muddy lawn.

Moments later, the flickering jack-o'-lantern ignited the leaking gas under the house.

As Jeff and Mary stumbled away, an earthshaking explosion knocked them to the ground. A hideous scream filled the air and flames licked through the screen windows beneath the house.

A burning hand reached out of the hole and writhed around. Then the fingers slowly closed and fell back into the darkness below.

# CHAPTER

## 22

Jeff stared at the burning house in horrified fascination. The orange glow of the fire lit up the black sky and the forest surrounding the Old Myers Place. Jeff wrapped his arms around Mary and hugged her tightly as she sobbed.

"It's over, Mary. It's over. He's dead now," Jeff said softly, stroking her tangled hair away from her dirty face. Mary was still too horrified to speak. She nodded her head and continued to sob.

As Jeff held her in his arms, he prayed that she'd be okay someday, given what they'd been through tonight. He tried to imagine the horror she had to be feeling. The whole horrifying experience... All of her best friends dead...

Jeff hugged her closer.

\*\*\*

Police and fire truck sirens wailed through the air as the emergency vehicles barreled down the road. Neighbors began to cluster in the street and point at the burning house.

Mary and Jeff were escorted off the lawn by paramedics. As the paramedics examined Mary, and even when they shined a bright, pinpoint light in her eyes, she just stared ahead, still stuck in the nightmare. They wrapped a blanket around her shoulders and began asking her questions, which she did not answer.

From somewhere deep down inside, Mary could hear them talking, and wanted to answer, but she couldn't bring herself to speak. It had been all too close, too real. But she knew she'd be all right. She'd made it this far and was still alive. It would just take time. Lots of time...

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Beneath the trees behind the house, away from the bright lights, Michael Myers pulled himself up off the ground. He steadied his

raspy breathing and lurched away from the flashing sirens and crackling radios. His singed clothes crackled against his burnt skin. The white plastic mask had been melted onto his face in the explosion. He stumbled along, making his way through the woods, carrying himself away from the gathering crowd.

But not too far...